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# Locust Songs

to Allan Seager

GEOFFREY HILL

## 1. THE EMBLEM

So with sweet oaths converting the salt earth  
To yield, our fathers verged on Paradise :  
Each to his own portion of Paradise,  
Stung by the innocent venoms of the earth.

## 2. GOOD HUSBANDRY

Out of the foliage of sensual pride  
Those teeming apples ! Summer burned well  
The dramatic flesh ; made work for pride  
Forking into the tender mouths of Hell

Heaped windfalls, mash for the Gadarene  
Squealers. This must be our reward :  
To smell God writhing over the rich scene.  
Gluttons for wrath, we stomach our reward.

## 3. SHILOH CHURCH, 1862 : TWENTY-THREE THOUSAND

O stamping-ground of the shod Word ! So hard  
On the heels of the damned red-man we came,  
Geneva's tribe, outlandish and abhorred . . .  
Bland vistas milky with Jehovah's calm . . .

Who fell to feasting Nature, the black glare  
Of buzzards circling ; cried to the grim sun  
' Jehovah punish us ! ' ; who went too far ;  
In deserts dropped the odd white turds of bone ;

Whose passion was to find out God in this  
His natural filth, *voyeur* of sacrifice : a slow  
Bloody unearthing of the God-in-us.  
But with what blood, and to what end, Shiloh ?

GEOFFREY HILL. Born 1932. Published : *For the Unfallen* in 1959.  
Visited U.S.A. 1959-60 ; lectured at the University of Michigan ; gave  
poetry-readings at New York University and Wayne State University.

## E. F. F. Hill - Biographical Note

E. F. F. HILL was one of our epoch's great men who remained virtually unknown to the world at large. His outward history is soon told. Born in 1896, he was privately educated, and at Birmingham University (where he studied political science) he took the degree of B.A., with honours; after which he went to Ridley Hall, Cambridge, to study for the priesthood. He was ordained Deacon in 1924 and Priest in 1925, of the Church of England. After 18 months as curate at St. John's, Ladywood, and 13 years as vicar, first of King's Norton Parish Church and then of St. Luke's, Dudley, he moved (his health being poor) to the remote rural parish of Holly Bush, near Ledbury, where he died, after several very severe operations for cancer, in 1954.

At Birmingham he had shown remarkable promise as a painter, holding an exhibition there in 1932 which provoked a *Daily Express* writer to hail him as a "Midland rival to Epstein." But in his latter years philosophy became a main interest. In this he was widely read, but he was specially involved in the existential tradition which runs from Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Dostoevsky to Berdyaev and Heidegger – portrait photographs of the latter were hung on his study walls at Holly Bush.

To outward appearance an unassuming, unremarkable parish priest (he was greatly beloved by his parishioners), inwardly Hill was a man of startling freedom and originality. His writings expressed this, and many reputedly intelligent people found them, and still apparently find them, incomprehensible, freakish and baffling. The main credit for publishing Hill's writings in his lifetime must go to the late Stefan Schimanski, who printed him, first, in the war-time book-magazine, *Transformation*, and afterwards in *World Review*. The greater part of his writings, nevertheless, remain unpublished, although I have two volumes of essays in typescript slightly the worse for wear through their handling in publishers' offices. Some day, no doubt, a publisher will be found with insight enough to remedy this state of things. That day is not yet; but I am grateful to the editor of STAND for venturing to print one of Hill's major writings, the superb *Apocalypse*. An earlier draft of this essay appeared in the 1940's in *A New Romantic Anthology*, edited by Stefan Schimanski and Henry Treece, but the present version is so changed as to be virtually a new book. The short essay, *Shame*, has not, to my knowledge, been printed before.

D. S. SAVAGE



# Shame

In *Letters from Tula* Pasternak writes : " Now there is no place on earth where a man may warm his soul with the fire of shame; shame is everywhere watered down and cannot burn ". If this is true, then Nietzsche was not mistaken when he said that God was dead and told of the day when man would allow himself to be overpassed.

When a man is ashamed, he sets a value upon his activity and his present condition which is relative to the fulfilment of his being. This implies that he recognizes his fulfilment, the truth as it concerns his self and all other selves. It does not imply that he is possessed of some metaphysical knowledge which does away with the need to transcend his present condition. To see one's goal is not the same as being at it. To know that I am degraded and from what cause and to what degree, because I know to what majesty I may come, is not the same as being noble.

Shame is the moment of vision in which a man searches and glimpses not only depth, where the bestial and sub-human hides, but also height, where the divine reveals itself. (Shame, too, is the connecting way between the bestial and the divine, which when a man treads upon he faces the divine.)

Shame does not arise in relation to thoughts and passions which a man hides, but to those which he lays bare. If there is a connection between shame and secrecy, it is on account of anxiety which shame has occasioned and the anxiety is always related to a possibility of not attaining fulfilment : whether and to what degree a man will be able to live by the truth and to meet the cost which this entails. Thus, while shame may co-exist with a sense of guilt, it is not to be confused with it. Shame is in the mode of a conversation which a man has, in the moment of awakening, with God.

Shame is a qualitative emotional context of an act of separation from that which degrades, disfigures and denies, of the moment when the younger son of the parable said : I will arise and go to my father . . . . There is consciousness of sin. Shame does not direct attention towards sin but towards the goal : Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect. And if it marks the distance which separates us from our goal, it also points the way, and the way is not swallowed up in distance.

Man is degraded because violence has been done. When man is violated by a superior power, he is that superior power.

Man may lose himself in depth : there is no limit below which he may not go. But he cannot lose himself in height; there is no limit which he cannot reach. His limit is in God. His infinity is not beyond the stars but within his self. Shame is a protest against all lesser truths.

Who am I that am ashamed? I am the life of all that lives. When I despise and degrade life outside myself, I degrade myself. God is my self's perfection. I cannot know my self's perfection save as I find it in an other self, in all other selves. Here we must look for the answer to Nietzsche's question : how did we do it?, that is, bring about the death of God?

Shame does not safeguard man's material welfare; it may hinder it. What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" is the form of all questions which arise at the moment that a man is ashamed. Shame marks the point where a man is poised between a lie and the truth, both being inward.

Shame safeguards God's image in man, the grandeur of God's conception of him, and his self as the bearer of it. The fact that shame does arise is the guarantee that God's conception of man is secure although it may be deeply buried and lost to view. It is the guarantee that God will rise from the dead. I think Pasternak must be right, for resurrection is an offence to us who have become accustomed to the practice of stamping out the light of millions that some future abstract good may be secured. But not until we have stamped out shame shall we have disposed finally of God.

What application has this to sex?

I hold it to be fundamental to any consistent view of sex that it is a condition of the whole being of man, spirit, soul and body. The view which limits it to bodily and biological functions is based upon a false and discredited antithesis of spirit and body.

In that I am spirit I am the eternal; in that I am soul I am the history of the race; in that I am body I am the determined life of nature. It is clear that a man may so order his life that any one of these may tend to become superior or inferior to the others, singly or in combination, but when he does so live, it is not as an integral but as a sundered and partial being. Yet, even so, spirit permeates the whole life of soul and body, and is never entirely absent from it when it appears that the body discredits the spirit and strives for the exercise of imperial power in its own right.


The body, the form of the body, is not the offspring of determined, mechanically-operating cosmic forces; it is a manifestation of spirit.

To live at the height of the spirit does not demand the destruction or denial of the body. It does demand and it does achieve the transformation of the body and its liberation.

Sex is a condition of want, of sundering which manifests itself throughout the entire being of man. As an *individual*, given integration of spirit, soul and body, man is incomplete and shame is connected with an appreciation of this incompleteness and of the need of overcoming it.

The problem of sex is fundamentally that of achieving wholeness with the Whole, man's immortal self at one with God's eternal possibility, and not of bringing together two individual's of opposite characteristics. Love is essential to its solution. Shame points to this requirement.





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# Apocalypse

APOCALYPSE AFFIRMS THE freedom of the human spirit, man's sonship and co-partnership with the divine in the transfiguration and redemption of the world and in the resurrection of the dead.

It affirms an encounter with the divine and the human from which there issues a spanning and embracing *word*. It therefore acknowledges that, in his freedom, man may reject the divine principle and enclose himself within the solitude of hell; that he may tear himself away from and rip asunder the embracing *word* and take refuge in a murmuring muttering silence.

To deny Apocalypse is to deny that man has access, in his own right and of his own freedom, to the spiritual sources of being. It is also to deny that man may, again in his own right and of his own freedom, sunder himself from these sources and live happily and self-contained in the perfected torments of the solitude of hell. But it is not to deny the existence of these sources; it is to make them external to and uninvolved in all world historical processes : that is, it is to put God at a distance from the world, to make God an attribute of distance and to substitute concepts and abstract propositions for the life of the spirit. An abstract proposition is never a statement of the truth, neither is it a sufficient ground upon which to base an enquiry into the truth.

The theme of Apocalypse is, therefore, hell and heaven, death and life, destruction and creation, the meaning of which it discloses. In that death is its theme, it is concerned with the tragic destiny of man being in the world. In that hell is its theme, it is concerned with the tragedy of man in his freedom, in its deepest and most acute form. Man may achieve victory over death and over time, he may rise from the dead and enjoy the torments of hell 'for ever.' But 'for ever' is infinity and immortality and not eternity. Infinity and immortality are death concepts which serve to define an unending homelessness. Eternity and resurrection are life concepts. There is an infinite instant and an eternal instant, and in both there is victory over time : in the former it is a victory achieved by the *I* for the *me* regardless of an other, as if there was no other; in the latter it is a victory achieved by the self for an other, for at least one other, and this is a victory over hell.

The theme of Apocalypse is the crisis of Spirit : either destruction or creation, either evil or incarnation.

## II.

Apocalypse is active; there are no passive elements in it. But there are passive apocalyptic moods. These have one common cause, although they differ in their summing-up of the historical process and in their account of man's position in it. They derive from a drying-up of the sources from which man has nourished his spiritual life and reflect a dread of freedom and the desire to throw off its burden. There is an oppressive feeling of anxiety which nothing in the world can relieve. The self is imprisoned in a world which is utterly meaningless and trivial. The end is in the

beginning. Man's life is an unfolding and not an embracing. There are moments when this metaphor will not do, when one must speak of a speeding, of an exhausting or of an ailing. The possibility of the co-operation of man in his freedom with God in His freedom in creative activity is denied. Indeed, freedom is denied both to man and to God, for man can do no other than await the coming horror, the divinely fated destruction of the world, and God must act under the binding necessity of a righteous anger – of anger according to law. It is not the principle of freedom which here enters into righteousness and judgment, but fear. And the fear of God is more terrible than the fear of man. God becomes his own evil and a darkness which engulfs the world. The principle of justice is dominant but it is abstract. The principle of love is absent.

Every evil thing brings death; of this there can be no two opinions. And evil things are in the world. But these passive apocalyptic moods can recognize no ground for the redemption and transfiguration of evil. Death is not an enemy to be overcome but a punishment to be endured. The historical process is swallowed up in death. Death is the evil meaning of life.

### III.

There are active apocalyptic moods which are false. Here the human principle is divorced from the divine in a manner which is no less absolute than is the case where the moods are passive. But whereas there the human is discredited, here it assumes the prerogatives of the divine. This is so, even in the case where a man takes the decisive step of renouncing the *evil* world with the avowed intention of discovering God in the depths of his own being. He forsakes the forsaken world and leaves it to its doom. But he cannot step out of the historical process, however thoroughgoing his introversion may be. Neither does his introversion throw any light upon the meaning of history, or of himself being in the world and being upon the point of forsaking the world now and not at some other time, here and not in some other place.

This is a condition of acute self-consciousness, and it remains so even at the moment (should such a moment come) when he plunges into the blinding darkness of a mystical abyss of absolute oneness with 'the Universal Spirit.' It is a condition which expresses the disharmony between his *me* and the world and his inability to resolve it. He declares his dislike of the world. He pronounces judgment upon the world and its meaninglessness. Yet his withdrawal from the world is something which takes place in the world and something which happens to the world. It inheres in and adheres to and, despite his intention and the passion with which he pursues it, it coheres with the world. It reflects the inner destiny of the world; the world is forsaken and given over to evil. What, in effect, he does forsake is not the world but an idea of the world. The world as being God-forsaken is never the judgment of those who love the world but of those who, from whatever motive, hate the world. It is the judgment of non-authentic being, of those whose being is founded, not in error (for here there is no *mistaken* judgment) but in non-truth. These men are unable to go beyond their discrete and individual state and, sundered from God, they assume the prerogatives of God.



#### IV.

There is yet another apocalyptic mood which is false. It is formally optimistic and full of hope for the future, and its language is paradisaical. But it is the mood of a perverted satanism.

There is no 'garden' but only a garden path paved with the trampled bones of rotted slaves. This mood associates itself with theories of progress and evolution and thus confuses the historical with the cosmogonic process, and often expresses itself in terms of a mixture of the two: this is especially so in its understanding of time and in its treatment of death.

There is no fated end to the world. If the world does end in catastrophe, then it will be because man has not exerted himself sufficiently to overcome the 'irrational' forces which are in him and has not applied with sufficient care the means which he has developed and is always improving for the mastery of Nature and his conquest of the world. The desired goal is the unending happiness of 'humanity' in a world from which evil has been driven out. And mastery over man and nature is the way to its accomplishment. But as mastery over nature is almost automatic, it is to mastery over man that attention must be given.

Man is the evil of the world and the curse of 'humanity', a rebel against the order of which he is a part: a disease.

The world is plastic; man is free and has the ability to shape it according to his determined ends. This gives definition to the scope of freedom. Matter is endowed with the qualities of spirit: it has its own dialectic. It would be a mistake to dismiss this as a piece of muddled thinking. It expresses a hope and a faith which should not be ignored. Impenetrability is not among the order of unchangeable things. Man has the wit to overcome it.

But man is not so plastic as the world; he is not so rational as matter. Even the rage of nature's untamed inner fires is less stupid. Therefore...

It is in the conclusion which it draws and in the steps which are taken to implement it that this mood is false. No angels guard the gates of paradise to keep man *out*, but faceless monsters strut along the way with flaming swords to drive man *in*. Man must be starved and tortured into happiness, made to march to future bliss under armed guard.

Everything which has taken place in the world so far is meaningless and full of corruption and deceit. *So far*. There is the naive assumption that the present is always superior to the past and the moment hence superior to the present, that somewhere among the on-rushing moments of the future there is one supreme moment which will bring with it the cancelling out of corruption and deceit. The past is discredited. Man is an individual, a part of a whole. The individual is born. The individual dies. The individual is born for death. This is his mission in the world. And

All the flowers of the spring  
Meet to perfume our burying.

The processes which are herein involved, even in the growing of the flowers of spring, are clearly understood and may be legislated for.

Death is trivialized and dismissed.

The individual has no intrinsic value. Value resides in the collective; the collective does not die. The hope for the future is based upon the death of the present: of the individual and of an epoch. There is here an attitude of earnest dissimulation; a travesty and a flight before the significance of death.

Man, the individual, is treated not as one who is creatively active in the unfolding of the historical process, in his dying as well as in his living, in his being born for death as well as in his being born for life, but as the product of a cosmogonic process, as an experiment in whom there is no unity of consciousness with previous experiments, to be himself over-passed and forgotten. He is held fast within the limits of a finite process which has no regard for its particulars. In so far as he is free – and freedom together with solidarity and love for humanity are not uncommon expressions of this apocalyptic mood – he is like the three blind mice, free to choose what he must choose under pain of liquidation. (This symbol, liquidation, still awaits the coming of its poet). The unfolding of higher from lower forms; the uncovering of meaning; the unity of consciousness in the transition from past to present, from present to future; the right and value of all present thought and action, are in the secret councils of the 'most high' whose mood this is, and are incomprehensible to him. He is not encouraged to know more than is necessary to the efficient discharge of his assigned function. He is to be understood and valued in terms of his function; that is, he is a tool whose value rests upon grounds which are relative to a collective purpose, the reaching of a far-off invisible goal.

An isolated consciousness is a contradiction in being, an ontological fissure. It is this which, in the reflection of this mood, man is encouraged to be. He is not permitted to be a universal and a transcendental consciousness. Not only may he not be free in the truth but, upon pain of the fear of the threat of death, he may not choose to know the truth. Truth is understood in terms of the congruence of an echo with the sound which it throws back. And to obey is to echo. Man's life has meaning only in obedience, labour and death; but upon his death will the future happiness of the world be based. He must be over-passed.

A study of the laws of 'nature' discloses that a man has but a short time to live and a shorter time to labour and produce, and that the generation of the sons takes over where the generation of the fathers leaves off. The generation of the fathers is immortalized in the generation of the sons. But this is not quite true, for the felicity of the generation of the fathers is lost to the generation of the sons. It is the labour of the generation of the fathers which is immortalized in the generation of the sons. The generation of the mothers waters the earth with its tears for the futility of the pains of its labour and is immortalized as the resting place of the deceased generations of the fathers. All the generations of men are immortalized, not in the far-off goal, but in the infinite recession of the goal, in the ceaseless striving to stay an insatiable longing.

Immortality is in time. It is a mistake to think that immortality is victory over time; it is victory over eternity. If immortality could be achieved, the eternal principle would be separated finally from the temporal.

Immortality is nothing but the unknowable moment hence, the inexhaustible torrent of moments hence which sweeps towards the present to destroy it. It is the incurable wound of sundered time. But sundered time is itself the symbol of a sundering within the consciousness of man, of a disintegration of being. It is really nonsense to speak of time as sundered. Time has no past, present or future. It is man's inner sundered, sexual and up-rooted being which reflects its torn and fretful



state upon outer circumstances, which buries the past, heeds not the present and defies the future.

The solution of universal history is in the healing of the wounds of man's inner sundered state and in regaining contact with the spiritual sources of being. It is to this that the Apocalyptic symbol points.

The world is not a possession but a victory. I do not conquer the world; I create the world; I overcome the original chaos which is before me.

It is the case that I may strive to possess the world, but the end of such striving is the destruction of the world.

I may strive to possess an other: my friend, my wife, my child, he who by his labour produces food for me or he who shapes the tools which I use to maintain my being in the world. But the end of such striving is the destruction of the other, the riving of the structure of the possibilities of the other — even though I supply to him the surfeit of every need. I deny the 'otherness' of the other and destroy the ground of the structure of my own possibilities. I am *then* he for whom all non-truth is possible, the order of whose disordered world the 'weird sisters' of Macbeth control.

Apocalypse does not speak of immortality; it speaks of death and hell, of resurrection and eternal life.

## V.

God is to be discovered in the depths of a man's being, but an other must be the searcher.

When a man turns inward as if he would find there the depths of his being, he does find depth but his being eludes him.

When a man turns inward as if he would find God in the depths through which he wanders, he stumbles over many things and hears the sound of many voices, but God he does not hear; and the light which is in him eludes him. He is, as it were, peering over his own shoulder, following in the footsteps of himself in his search. He is searching for himself in the shadow of himself that he may find in the depths of the shadow of himself the God who is the ground of his being. He is behind himself as the *past* of himself. It is his *me* whom he finds and follows, the world of his *me* which he explores, the contents of his *mine* which he uncovers and surveys: the range of his possessions. But the finding of his *me* is a non-creative act. He finds and follows an abstraction to which he ascribes a structure of fictitious possibilities, but his own possibilities are forgotten, and the structure of them, the structure of his authentic being in the world and being before an other in the world, is denied. From this he moves away. He is a hunter who wounds himself *from behind*. The story of his hunting and his wounding is written in the 'book sealed with seven seals' which 'no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth' is able to open. He is the hunter who, riding upon a white horse, enslaves the peoples of the earth and pierces and enslaves himself *from behind*; who, riding upon a red horse, destroys the peace of the earth and slays himself *from behind*; who, riding upon a black horse, is the famine and pestilence of the peoples of the earth and starves and emasculates himself *from behind*; who, riding upon a pale horse, is the death and the hell of all that lives upon the earth and is his own death and his own hell which creep upon him *from behind*. He is neither *present* to himself nor *before* himself, but is *absent* from himself and without a *future*.

I do not find God until I find him in an other, in the 'otherness' of at least one other. God does not disclose his self, God is not a self to disclose until I uncover him in the otherness of an other.

Man is upon earth and *in the* world as the bearer of the meaning of the earth and of the world, even when he hides himself in the innermost reaches of his being. Every man, without exception, is in the world as the bearer of its meaning – to an other who will search until he finds it in him. All things which properly belong to the category *human* may be preserved, but if this one thing is not disclosed all is lost: that I am in the world as the truth of the world and before all others as the truth of all others; that the world is around me and all others confront me as the truth that I am; that I am answerable to the world for the truth of the world and to all others for the truth of each other. We may have beings who walk the earth in the fashion of men, but until this is disclosed the category *human* is null and void and the concept *divine* is merely a part of formal speech.

Meaning is disclosed, not as an answer to any question how? or what? or why? which man may ask and not in any objective or subjective mode, but as the creative response of God to man's own creative activity: deep calls unto deep, the eternal calls unto the eternal. On the one hand, the disclosure of meaning is the communion of man with the structure and content of God's discovery and knowledge of being and, on the other, it is the communion of God with the structure and content of man's discovery and knowledge of being. These are two moments of a single act. There can be no revelation, no disclosure of meaning, if there is a rift between the two. The instant of disclosure is an apocalyptic instant. It is also an eternal instant.

By communion I mean something much closer than 'entering into' or sharing.

It is of the constitution of my being in the world, that I am between an other (indeed, between *all others*) and the structure of his possibilities as the destroying or creating factor in this intimate relationship, moving either to tear and keep apart these related terms or to fuse them into a rhythmic whole. I am the possibility of that other. This being-between as the possibility of an other is the definition of my power to be the truth of that other, the thrusting forward, the reaching out of my possibilities. It is also the definition of my power to be the death and the evil of that other, the thrusting forward and the reaching out of my power to be for death.

It is thus that I am between God and the structure of His possibilities and He is between me and the structure of my possibilities.

I am the possibility of God, God is my possibility.

I am the interpreter of God, God is my interpreter.

I am the voice of God, God is my voice.

I am the hand of God, God is my hand. All that which is *given* and which is here or there in the world to *find* is under *our* hand; all that which is yet to be is before our *hands*.

I am the home of God, God is my home.

I am the life of God, God is my life.

I am the death of God, God is my death.

I am the possibility of hell and of heaven, of the raging tempest and the music of the stars, of the consuming fire and the healing water of the



well, of the whore and of the bride, of the beast and of the saint, of 'the cold serpent, which is the Devil and Satan' and of the Christ. I am the possibility of the fall of God.

In communion, the structure of my possibilities and the structure of the possibilities of an other flow together and are fused. *Married* is the emphatic metaphor. They are fused in such a way that no change takes place in the structure of either, but that out of the fusion there arises a third structure of possibilities which is not the sum or the blending or the product of either, but is the ground and constituting factor of both. His new structure is neither mine nor the other's but *ours*; not the ground of my being or the ground of his, but the ground of *our being*. A new *man* is born and a new *world* created, which has its own structure of possibilities, its own destiny and yet is ours – not as a possession but as a habitation, a temple in which we dwell, in which I and the other together are incarnate and are revealed as incarnate. Communion is not of the intellect or of the heart or of the soul, but of the structure of the possibilities of the *whole* being of 'I-and-an-other'. An other speaks: I hear-and-answer, therefore I exist, therefore I am. And the moment and the medium of its consummation is that with which we are occupied in advance, *before* the reaching out of our possibilities; the past which we are handling in the present for the future: the pen of the one and the hammer of the other, the word of the one and the scythe of the other, the silence of the one and the cry of the other, the song of the one and the curse of the other.

## VI.

It is not possible to set too high a value upon the worth of any man, even upon the 'worthless' – upon the spent, the finished, the corrupt, the far-removed, the dead. But it is according to the degree in which I succeed in uncovering dignity and honour in an other that I have sufficient ground to affirm it of myself.

It is not possible to search too far into the future, to be before myself in the passion of decision, in the out-reaching and extending of my possibilities on behalf of the depraved, the sordid and the dead. The concept worth belongs to the category of the future, and the concept future belongs to the categories of faith, hope and truth, and faith and hope and truth belong to the category of love. Love is the supreme life concept.

There is a place upon this earth where I may stand in heaven; it is wherever I chance upon an other, for he comes towards me as the creation of the wisdom of God, the bearer of the divine meaning of the earth and of the world, of death and hell, of evil and good, of slavery and freedom, of redemption and life. If, when I meet him, I see only the satanic, if I see nothing noble but only banal and sordid things, the task is set me, not to sentimentalize and slobber over him, not to judge and condemn him, but to uncover the divine and thus to reveal the human: the creation of the wisdom of man.

This is man's supreme engagement. I am the place where earth and heaven meet. I am the marriage of heaven and hell: the creator of the world of their meeting. War in heaven is in my self whenever and wherever I chance upon an other and nowhere else. I am the war in heaven. I am the crisis of the Spirit. The highways of the world, its factories and market places, its dens and palaces, its battlefields and

temples : I am the hallowing of these and I their curse in the moment of my meeting with an other.

The Apocalyptic symbol bears directly upon this. Sundered from the life sources of being and sundered within the self, man's struggle is to become a self : to be awake to life and living, for the power to go towards life. He is the power to go before himself towards death. His struggle, his task, his engagement with himself, now neither behind nor before himself nor yet *with* that which is before or behind himself, is to be with himself in his going before himself through death towards life : to marry death into life. I am this struggle and this task. But I cannot enter on it by and for myself.

The self

is like to a grain of mustard, which a man took, and sowed in his field : which indeed is the least of all seeds : but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

I cannot be a self, I cannot be awake to life, I can be none other than an individual sundered part, empowered to go beyond myself to my dying, save as I am at one with my fellowmen – the meanest and the noblest and the nameless multitudes between – in the oneness of our communion with God.

The achievement of awakening into life implies triumph over the sickness of individuality. It is the victory of man in his freedom over egoism, over the spirit which denies the worth, the future of an other, of any other, which denies (if I may be allowed the use of the abstract term) the possibility of 'otherness'. It is the victory of man over the spirit which cannot break through the condition of particularity, over the spirit of Hell. I am Hell.

Man's position in the world is tragic, not because he cannot find God, but because God cannot find him, because he hides himself from God.

To deny oneself to life is to hide oneself from God. In a rigorous absolute sense, in the fundamental ontological sense, it is the tragedy of a broken home, of a house swept clean and *empty*.

The tragedy of man is the tragedy of a wandering, homeless God, of a portentous Spirit brooding over a riven form, over an end point, a past, a conclusion, a summing-up, a judgment, over *the* abyss. God is my evil. I am God. And God is dead.

When God does discover man, he is found crucified, subjected to torture, ignominy and death at the hands of those who affirm God but deny man to God, that is those who deny the freedom of God's search for and approach to man. Atheism is not primarily the denial of God, but the denial of man in the presence of God.

When a man turns away from the world with a view to forsaking the world because it is fallen and evil and terror-ridden, he turns away from God, for all that is mean and evil in the world is the Wisdom of God, and every uttered word, every curse and blasphemy is the Word of God, every thought the Logos of God, distorted and debased and riven and empty, waiting its redemption, waiting the apocalyptic instant.

When a man creeps into himself, away from the world, and fertilizes himself, he dies to the doom of the world, and from himself brings forth a new heaven and a new earth, both strictly private. Private, as a man's past is private, as every sundered part in every realm at every level is



private; private, waiting for 'seven devils more wicked than himself' to come with him to banquet in and on his emptiness. He does achieve victory over death but Hell is enlarged. He shapes for his highest good a world in which he may go unhindered upon his solitary sovereign way. He dies to the doom of the world. He cannot rise to the redemption and transfiguration of the world.

It is according to the degree in which we live in others in our freedom and others live in us in their freedom that the many worlds which fill *the* world grow into the form of a universe and that we know ourselves to be its centre. To the egoist there is but one world and no universe.

## VII.

The fundamental antithesis of history is not that of spirit and matter, life and form, or of good and evil, or of the divine and the satanic, but of freedom in the truth and fear of the truth. And this cleft is within me, in the depths of my own being. It is my own being in the world and being before an other in the world.

There would be no historical as distinct from a cosmogonic process, if each man was not able to be the truth and to be the power to recognize and make actual the truth, if he was not the power to uncover and to speak the truth and the power to be *between* the uncovering and the speaking of the truth, between the uncovered truth and the *word*.

Truth, not as an object of search and knowledge, nor as relating to any partial state, whether of time as concerning the past or as anticipating the future, or of space as setting a value upon the established relatedness of mutually exclusive things, but truth as the direct unmediated revealing, uncovering, comprehending, apprehending and assimilating of the rhythmic unity of the Whole, is of the very ground of the structure of man's consciousness.

This is explicitly the divine image which each man bears and is the ground of his absolute worth. But for this there could be no apocalypse, no disclosure of meaning.

Truth is the origin, the absolute first act of which the spoken *ES* is the effective and emphatic symbol, and of which the symbols, set out in the preceding paragraph but one, are inseparable and irreversible moods and modes.

A word is spoken: I heard-and-answer, therefore I exist, therefore I am. It is this drama and this history of which the *ES*, the root of all action and of all creation, is the symbol. Whatever *is* is *true*. The precise statement is: Whoever *is* is true. And: Whoever *is-not* is *not-true*.

The goal of history is not an end to be reached, but a task to be taken up, a decision to be made, a life to be lived. It is the achievement of truthfulness in a situation which is radically uncertain, unstable, unpredictable, threatening, destructive, devouring.

To be a person is to be true, authentic, to *be* in and before a situation which is ontically quick to destroy. History is the anticipation of the person, of the self, of truth. It is the knowledge of the *not-yet*, of man being before, in advance of the truth, in advance of his self, of man being between God and the structure of His possibilities.

Thus the concept 'individual' is inadequate and false in relation to man and to history, however useful it may be in determining the position and role of an object in the cosmogonic process. That which *is* is not a

part of a sum of parts. That which is a part or a sum of parts *is-not*. That which *is* is not a means to any end whatsoever. That which is a means to any end *is-not*. That which *is* is *whole*. He who *is* is *whole* is the precise statement. He *is* the whole in God; God *is* the whole in him. Wholeness is not a state in which one is, but a victory. And victory is, to use the only effective symbol, *marriage*. To be whole is to be married. Wholeness is not the victory of man or the victory of God; it is the victory of man in God and God in man of which the Christ is the symbol and creative living the expression. Wherever there is the perfect God *and* the perfect man, wherever, that is, there is the marriage of the perfection of the possibilities of God with the perfection of the possibilities of man, there there is the Christ. But apart from this marriage the perfect God is-not : there is the wandering, brooding, evil God; and the perfect man is not : there is the empty, derelict dwelling place, the man born for death. There is :

London, Paris and New York; Moscow, Berlin and Vienna; Belgrade, Buda-Pesth and Rome; Jerusalem, Tokio and Babylon – the empty shards of Paradise, and Life itself the utter blasphemy. Empty, even though a thousand million atoms swarm like locusts over a parched earth; speechless, even though a multitude of voices sound like the confused muttering of the waters of a restless sea.

I am the whole in God.

Thou art the whole in God.

We are the whole in God.

It would be a foolish blunder to assume that an identity of grammatical structure implies an actual identity. There is no identity here, no similarity, no repetition, but uniqueness and authenticity. The divine image which I bear and which another must uncover is unique, authentic and irreplaceable, and is my creative contribution. The divine image which another bears and which I must uncover is unique and authentic and irreplaceable, and is his creative contribution.

Creative activity is polar : it is the rhythmic unity of two confronting, meeting principles : on the one hand, my bearing the divine image and, on the other, my disclosure of the divine image which another bears. When these are sundered there is both the incommunicable madness of the isolated and the faceless 'all-togetherness' of the collective. And the conflict between the two is the Apocalyptic armageddon.

## VIII.

Apocalypse differs from all theories of progress in that it affirms the intrinsic worth of everyone who has lived and his participation in and contribution to the solution of universal history. It affirms the ability of man for death. But it also affirms the ability of man for resurrection from death. It reserves for him, no matter to what 'period of time' he may belong, the disclosure of meaning, the solution of history. In reserving this for a generation which is 'future' in the sense that it is 'not-yet', theories of progress deny destiny to all save the dead. Such a 'future' generation would have no history and no destiny. In a strict sense, theories of progress have nothing to say of 'meaning' or of 'history'. They derive from and sustain themselves by the disintegration of being and deny the past save as it has served as a means to the present. Revolution is resurrection into time : the denied and forgotten dead rise

in revolt against the oppressive present. But it does not bring with it the power to heal the wounds of division, the sickness of disintegration. It is war between the sundered parts. It is a disjunction of consciousness; Revolution has its own theory of progress.

Apocalypse is neither optimistic nor pessimistic. Its vision is entire. Its action is ruthless. It penetrates into the darkest place. It tears off every mask, rolls back every respectability, overturns every morality, exposes every secret thing. One may no longer speak of the unconscious, the sub-conscious, the conscious or the super-conscious: these are formal divisions and are discarded. There is only the unity of consciousness. There is not an obscenity or a deceit or a crime, not a sordid triviality or a cry or a despair which is not exposed to view. None is permitted to become a world to itself. Each is englobed in history.

Apocalypse is incredible. Life is incredible. Man is incredible. God is incredible. History is incredible.

The book sealed with seven seals, the book of history to which reference has already been made, is filled with such incredible horror that 'no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon' save 'the Lamb that was slain'. And at the opening of the seventh seal, heaven itself is frozen into silence at the disclosed horrors which involve the cosmogonic with the historical process. But it is not a non-human principle, a sort of universal mind or will before which man is powerless or against which he must wage war, which is the operating cause. Every human action is a seed; every seed bears fruit; every fruit must be eaten. The ancient insight which discloses this much of the truth cannot be ignored. Man is de-polarized and is passing out of history. He is, indeed, civilized, moral, good, efficient, just, but giving the worth of the whole to his sundered parts, he speeds across the world conquering and to conquer, to starve and to kill.

When we idealize a fragment, even though the fragment be the last remaining sign of dignity, even if we call the fragment 'God', the process of disintegration has gone far. The end is - nothing. We shout glory because infamy surrounds us and we ourselves are infamous; honour because of dishonour; dignity because of meanness; purity because of filth; greatness because of triviality. There is no entire vision. We are caught up in a process which is not cosmogonic but spiritual, a process of decomposition, of life going back upon itself and making all real things unreal. We are its playthings, and because we have surrendered to it, we have surrendered to death. We cry aloud for humanity, sacrifice the generations and ourselves, turn every nook and cranny into a Golgotha, nail ourselves to crosses of our own making, because we loathe men and women and bury ourselves in the dust of lifeless systems.

The disclosure of horror is not an entire vision. The incredible thing about the Apocalypse is the passion of spirit which breaks forth into song. Harps and crowns and white robes and pavements of gold and walls of crystal and the light of the sun and the river of life are doubtless naive symbols, without historical connection, to men who cannot get away from abstractions and rusting iron and broken machinery and slag heaps and syphilis and bombs and poison gas and deserts and fear and the smell of death. The symbols matter little before the passion of the spirit which breaks into song. The horror *and* the song; the great Whore *and* the Bride *and* the Lamb; evil *and* good; death *and* life, polarized in rhythmic wholeness: married.



It is here that the meaning of death and hell is disclosed and the dignity and majesty of man is established, 'for since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead'.

Resurrection of the dead *is* history. History *is* resurrection of the dead.

History is not the past and is not to be found in nor confounded with an account of the past.

I am history.

Thou art history.

We are history.

I am history in that I am the three-fold power

1. to *be-for* the growing and the reaching out of my possibilities beyond all far horizons;
2. to *be-between* an other and the structure of his possibilities;
3. to *be-present* with myself in the engagement of myself with the extension of my possibilities beyond the farthest horizon, and in being between an other and the structure of his possibilities.

I am history, not because I once uncovered the structure of my possibilities and interpreted the structure of the possibilities of an other and revealed myself in this engagement with myself and all this may now be reported of me, nor yet because at this moment I am engaging myself with myself in the exercise of this three-fold power, but because I am already so engaged and *present to myself* in my engagement.

I am the past of all others in that I am the power to *be-between* all others and the structure of their possibilities, and all others are the past that is I.

I am the future of all others in that I am the power to uncover the structure of my possibilities *as* the interpreter of all others, and all others are the future that is I.

I am the present of all others in that I am the power to *be-present* to myself in my engagement with myself as the past and the future of all others and all others are the present that is I.

All others. I and thou and we : the past, the present and the future of all others, the history and the solution of the history of all others. It is here that fear of the truth takes root and hides its growth behind a 'wrathful indignation' and a righteous summing-up. Fear of the truth is fear of the worth of an other, of all others.

## IX.

Death *and* resurrection from the dead is the only way by which a man may overcome his sundered state and triumph over hell. Hell is the condition of de-polarized man who cannot die. The inability to die is of the sweet tormenting pleasures of hell. So also is the inability to love.

Death is not the denial of infinity but its affirmation. The achievement of personality, of truth, is victory over death and hell. It is *the* creative act, the ability to worship the worth of an other, of all others. Death is not a tragedy to the individual : it is its inevitable end. Death is my act, my being *in* my act, *in* my looking, feeling, smelling, *in* my labour and my pleasure, *in* my meeting and my passing by. Death is not something which, creeping upon me from behind, overtakes me or yet something which comes towards me or towards which I move as I take myself towards the future. Death is a tragedy when there is awareness of the self, of truth, and then because of the loss or the fear of the loss of the worth of an other. The loss of the worth of an other is a shattering of the unity of consciousness and is an historical event.

Love for all that is involves the anguish of the struggle against death for the sake of the worth of at least one other.

To do what a man may do for any end whatsoever which does not include the worship of the worth of an other is death; it is the definition of death, and is part of the process of the disintegration of being. Love for an other may be transformed into love for an idea, for some abstract goal. It is when this happens that Satan falls from heaven and his vexatious journeyings to and fro upon the earth begin. The fall of Satan from heaven is an historical event: history is fallen.

It is a mistake to think that evil is irrational: it rationalises freedom. To mine coal, bake bread, remove mountains, dam rivers, cross seas, civilize savages – each is a task easy to define, but death is its end if it be not done as the worship of the worth of an other, of all others.

Thus it is that man is enslaved both to the machine which he has made to 'master' nature and to nature, and also to the social norm which he has established. The machine, nature (the cosmogonic process) and society become instruments of death. It is man's task, well within the range of his possibilities and ontically grounded, to redeem nature, the machine and society. This is the new element in consciousness, the new enrichment of the truth, the new war in heaven. It is a crisis of Spirit, a life crisis. It is not a question of victory of good over evil, of justice over injustice, of equality over inequality. It is not a battle of words or of abstractions. It is not a matter of testing the truth or falsity of propositions, or of measuring the value of beliefs. Such trifling matters are not involved. It is a question of triumph over death: whether man, the man *behind* the man who speaks the words and distils the abstractions and forms the propositions and believes the beliefs, will be free in the truth or will succumb to fear of the truth and seek refuge behind an over-passed horizon.

But man does not redeem nature by improving it, nor the machine by perfecting it, nor yet society by reforming it, but by reversing the process of disintegration of being, of which his own de-polarized state is the deep ground.

Whatever a man does as worship of the worth of an other – of at least one other – is victory over death and the redemption of the instruments of his toil. Freedom in the truth, together with the worship of the worth of all others is of the essence of the spirit of communion. It is the definition of the Holy Spirit, its incarnation, its redemption from evil. A deflection from this, to howsoever slight a degree, leads to tyranny and death.

The crowning symbol of the Apocalypse, the marriage of the Lamb and his Bride, is that of sexual love, the uncovering and affirmation of the worth of an other; the healing of the wounds of conflict between de-polarized sundered parts. Hell is vanquished; the death-world is transfigured and redeemed and becomes the life-world.

Fear of the truth is not fear of what a thing is in itself – of what an other is in himself, but of what he or it may bring forth. It is fear of creation, of life. If I may refer to an earlier statement, it is fear of the third structure of possibilities, of the *new* world, the *new* man; fear to be an interpreter, to speak out of the structure of one's own possibilities. It is fear of the consummation of marriage, lest the virgin shall conceive and bring forth. It is fear of the child; fear to cast a light upon an actual fact, to give it significance until it burns with the fire of its own giving.

There is no formal victory over death and no formal statement of it. There is only a living victory and its statement in a new life.

The whore we look upon, the symbol of all corruption and the last death, is a woman and has a woman's eye. And if it be that all we see is the sickening light of inflamed passion, we do but look upon the surface and miss what from the depths is rising to look out. There is a depth beyond the deep where all are drowned who touch and enter here; there is a dark intensity more dark and troubled than the dark and troubled death which wanders in the sordid soul; a dark and troubled god breathes with the intensity of life for light and birth: the second birth of the lord of life.

The great Harlot that hath destroyed earth with her vice, from her shall come forth the Lamb, the slain child, the husband of the Bride.

Upon the instant a man uncovers the dignity and honour and worth of an other and so lives in that other that he worships the worth of all others, he justifies in himself the historical process, is himself its goal and its meaning, and lives the eternal life, even though, upon the instant following, his body twist with the torment of disease or of the cruelty of men and die. The eternal from a living source has broken through the closed order of finite and temporal relationships and transfigured it. *He* lives the eternal life. *He* is the first and the last; *he* it is 'that liveth and was dead and is alive for evermore'. *He* holds the keys of hell and of death. God is revealed upon earth.

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By the everlasting	God
It seems to me extremely	odd
That in Hell forever	burning
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And the Virgin Mary's	flower
Ever longing to	devour
Thou shouldst, in thy dreadful	sorrow
Never steal or beg or	borrow
Any of the bright lamps of	even
Burning before God in	Heaven

[Shelley was playful by nature, and like W. H. Auden enjoyed parlour-games with words (several of his best-known short pieces, still being solemnly devalued by poker-faced modern critics, were in or near this category). His cousin Medwin tells how, in 1821, the Shelleys and their friends at Pisa, who included Jane and Edward Williams, sometimes had evenings of music and games of *bouts-rimés*:

On one occasion, I remember a remarkable instance of Shelley's facility and exercise of imagination. A word was chosen, and all the rhymes to it in the language, and they were very numerous, set down, without regard to their corresponding meanings, and in a few minutes he filled in the blanks with a beautifully fanciful poem, which, probably, no one preserved . . .

These lines, evidently attached at top speed to their rhyme-words, and here first printed by permission of the Delegates of the Clarendon Press, seem to be the only example of *bouts-rimés* surviving from those evenings.

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 Widens over these vacant shores  
 And sea-lands, over the blue vacancy  
 And blink of ocean. Now, where the beaches run,  
 Curving and fading, east and west,  
 Their tawny road between  
 The dunes with their tufted green  
 Pale against a blue sky  
 And the white line of foam that fringes  
 The sea-blue sea along a less blue sky,  
 The mounting sun pours down  
 His blessing; and on the inland ways,  
 On Whooping Boys Hollow and Toilsome Lane  
 And on the road to Georgica,  
 His benediction falls. I sit here, musing,  
 An open book upon my knees.  
 Great trees bend over me. It is Sunday morning.  
 From Montauk Highway no murmur. A jet  
 Gargles its way across heaven, and fades  
 Seaward. The silence is so great,  
 Almost I fancy I hear  
 The wing-beat of the butterfly  
 Cavorting with happy aimless flight  
 Over the garden, over the thicket,  
 In the still light.  
 I take up my book and read,  
 At the head of the page,  
 "O heart, be at peace."

Dark sound of the sea, soft shadow of the sea  
Between blurred dunes that cup this quiet place,  
Vast shores, vague night – how sharply memory  
Brings it all back, your step, your voice, your face,  
On nights long lost that brought you here to me,  
With a low sound, with a soft low sound of the sea :

The fear of your coming, terror lest you should not come,  
Oh, insupportable waiting, the insane  
Anguish and joy, longing's delirium –  
The kiss first given and taken and given again,  
The words said over and over endlessly,  
To a low sound, to a soft low sound of the sea.

Vast odor of the sea, soft shuffle of the sea  
Along waste shores – what memory shall assuage  
The heart burdened with many a memory,  
The heart of youth, grown wiser now in age,  
And lost to itself ! O love no more to be,  
First love, young love, wild love, come back to me,  
With a low sound, with a soft low sound of the sea.

John Hall Wheelock, a well-known American poet, is published both here and in the U.S.A. by Scribners, who are issuing his tenth book, *The Gardener and Other Poems*, in September, exactly half a century after the appearance of his first collection.



## MORNING AFTER RAIN

For days it had "literally",  
As my grandmother put it, "rained cats and dogs."  
Toward dawn it cleared, the unblemished sky  
Shone soft pewter. I got up early this morning  
And walked under the elms and down  
The glade, with an eye on the weather,  
Hoping that it would hold. Already,  
Small lapdog clouds with a curious fixed  
Air of determination were moving  
Forward, onward, eastward, forward,  
Across heaven, to heaven knows where.  
Earth smelled of rain and dew, the foliage  
Sparkled in the fresh jungle of green  
On either side, where birds flashed in and out,  
Shaking down raindrops, eyes of water  
The sun looked into, that glittered up into mine  
Out of the grass. Suddenly they came over,  
The wild swans, in close formation –  
Three of them. I have always held  
That the bird who glides on motionless wing  
Gets transportation for very little, but these  
Great hulks oared their laborious way,  
With stretched-out necks and synchronous rhythm,  
Solemnly, slowly, pontifically,  
Over my head, the huge wings  
Going whoosh, whoosh, as they departed  
Westward. Where the day-lily stood  
In her pride of being, I bent over  
To touch a slender blossom opening  
Toward the first sunlight, and forgot  
The wild swans. But all morning  
I was haunted, not by them  
So much as by the thought of the air  
That had carried those bulky forms, its firmness,  
What it is like to be a bird  
And feel under your wings, as a swimmer  
The water under his arms, the resilience  
You push against bearing you up,  
Its flow and ripple along the feathers –  
To launch upon it and know in joy  
The solidity on which you learn to rest  
Your confident weight and body, who are  
A swimmer in the air. And other  
Thoughts about the air were with me  
All day: how every word we speak  
Is made of a mouthful of it, the poem,  
The real one, the one spoken,  
Made of the air such billions of us,  
Over the centuries, have breathed

And then let go, so that, as Rilke said,  
We have been father to many a tempest,  
As the dead before us were, whose life-breath  
We breathe again into new words,  
New prayers, new poems, and which, again surrendered,  
Those after us shall use, in their turn,  
For it is inexhaustible; also, how  
This air, without smell, without taste,  
Colorless, wholly invisible,  
Will float, nevertheless, the burdened  
Tonnage of air-liners with all their freight,  
As though they were downy feathers, or topple  
A town, in its fury, and provoke  
Waves till they whiten with anger; it is  
The protective ocean on whose floor  
We move about, and without whose protection  
The sun's rage, or the absolute  
Zero, on his departure, would shrivel us  
To cinders. But chiefly I thought of it  
As the fostering breast from which we suck  
The milk of life; laughing or sobbing,  
Talking, working, even asleep,  
With every breath we draw it in,  
That heavenly food on which, from the first  
Cry to the final gasp groping for it,  
We have depended all our days.  
Oh, how reluctantly in the end  
We are weaned from that bountiful and kindly  
Breast, whose unfailing sustenance,  
More necessary than bread or water,  
We cannot lack for long! Tomorrow,  
In the early morning when breathing is sweetest,  
I plan, if the weather holds, to walk  
Under the elms once more and down  
The path in the woods still wet with rain,  
Shining with dew and happy birdsong –  
Song made of crystal morning air,  
Dripping of water on cool leaves –  
And have, perhaps, if only a glimpse  
Of the striped chipmunk as he hurries  
Across the open, for a dread  
Moment, between cover and cover  
Of dark undergrowth and shady grass.

## Some American Painters

### NOTES ON 'THE FOREVER EFFECT'

THE DRIP TECHNIQUE (let's call it that without argument for the present purpose) gets going in American painting in the Winter, 1946-47. The first large drip paintings by Pollock (*Full Fathom Five* and *The Cathedral*) are dated 1947 and this seems to mean early rather than later in the year, because there is a small drip painting by Pollock, signed and dated 1946, the linear tangle of which is close to the knotted webs of the two larger works. The term drip technique covers paintings done by the pouring and splashing, as well as the dripping, of paint down onto a canvas flat on the floor. The marks are made by the artist as he takes advantage of the viscosity of paint (often enamels from a can) and the pull of gravity.

The characteristic traces of pressure applied by hand and brush are not present (or if they are they are contrasted with the dropped marks), but their absence does not mean the anarchy which early critics attributed to drip paintings. Pollock, for example, by means of his technique could establish lines of a sustained continuity which would have been impossible if he had continued to produce them by the pressure of brush or paint tube directly on the canvas. Such works always show variation, as the brush drags dry, or as the paint issues unevenly from the tube. Pre-drip paintings by Pollock show a tendency towards an endless linearism, the forever effect, but clogged by a traditional technique. Once he had mastered the drip technique (developed probably from some trickled and splashed paintings by Hans Hofmann done in the early 40's) he was able to achieve the forever effect naturally, without interference from a strained technique.

In a painting like *Black, White, and Grey*, 1948, there is a spatial effect which is impossible in any other medium or by any other technique. The enamel has been poured in fine curved tracks, black and grey overlapping and spreading slightly on the moist ground. The result is a fluent animation of the whole surface: the marks hold the surface without insistence and, at the same time, imply ceaseless motion in space. The marks are diffused equally over the whole picture area, replacing by the forever effect the patterns of centring and balancing that we are accustomed to see in easel paintings. The whole surface is evenly accented, but never in such a way as to establish a monolithic solid plane: on the contrary, the image, as its lines criss-cross and thicken and thin has a rhythm like that of breathing.

Characteristics of Pollock's drip paintings, then, is an uncentred, serial structure, which is the antithesis of, say, Franz Kline's emphatic one-image paintings, in which the image is identified wholly with a simple, legible form (like a gate or a head). The marks that Pollock made, armlength gestures, tracks made by reaching far across the canvas, record the movement of his body in the creative act. Pollock's involvement with the painting is recorded by an extensive series of marks which testify to the physical presence of the artist. Thus the marks of a Pollock drip painting are intimately related to the artist as the subject of his own work, not in terms of a narcissistic specialism but literally as the maker of the work. As the formal hierarchy of centred forms, of a scale from large to small



forms, is abandoned in such painting, it is replaced by an autographic display which involves the whole body and not simply the hand of the painter.

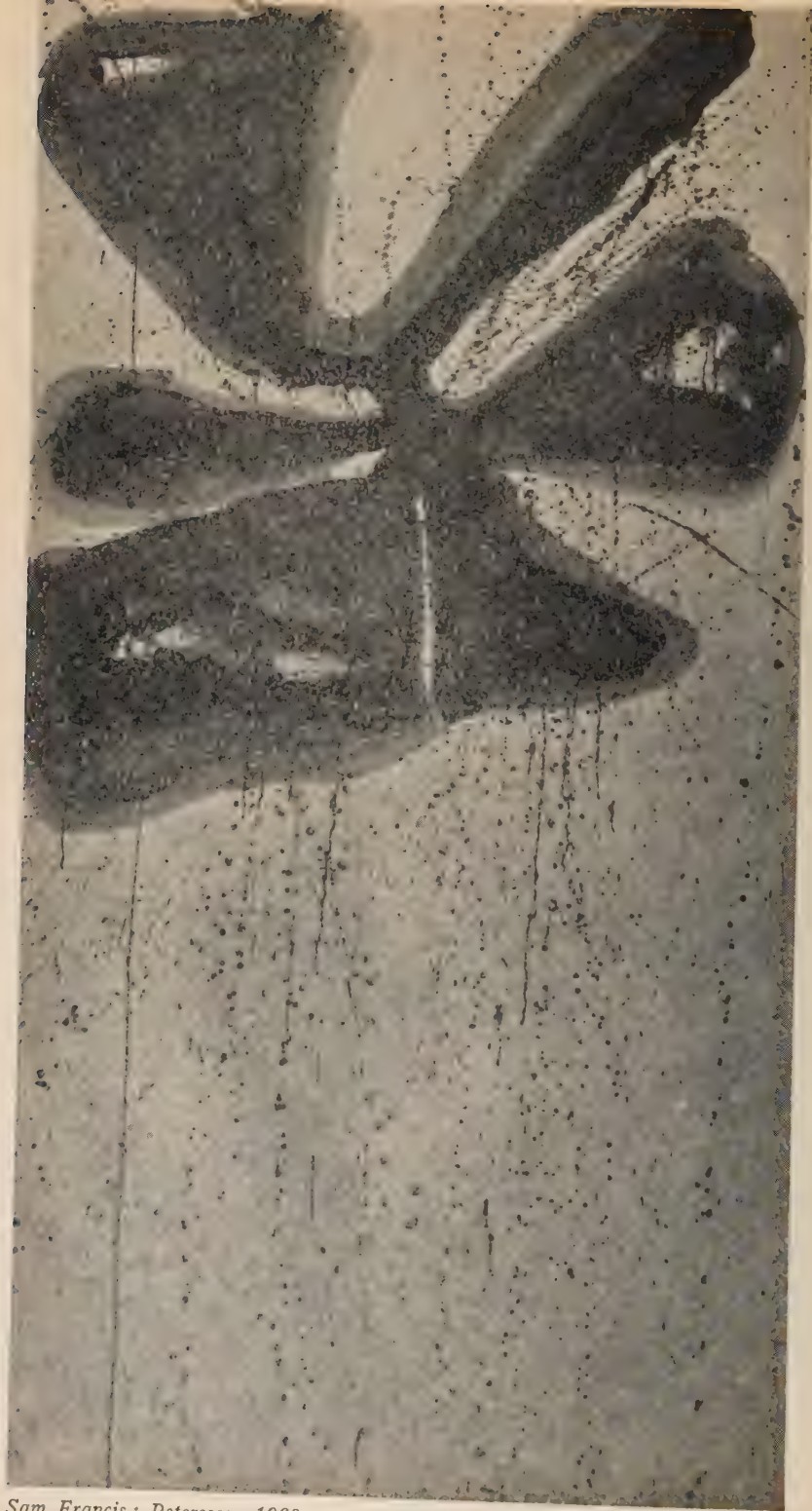
As a rule Pollock's drip technique was linear, so that the common way of writing about it in terms of a web or a labyrinth has a certain aptness. However, though Pollock's main gifts were linear, he also made important *non-linear drip paintings, such as 26, 1951*. The paint used is solely black and at first sight the image may appear to be calligraphic (i.e. directional). In fact, however, Pollock is responding to a technical characteristic of duco poured onto unprimed canvas, which had been his main means during the black period of 1951. The paint trails all blurred softly at the edges, as the canvas absorbed the paint, giving a hovering effect which somewhat opposed the directional flow of the linear marks. In 26 the paint is poured in soft blots and broad areas which open out on the surface instead of heading in various directions. The forms are discontinuous and non-directional.

Robert Goldwater observed last year of the drip method: 'it is, I believe, correct to refer to it in the past tense'. If by drip method is meant only linear usage, he is right, but, in fact, there is no reason to restrict it to that. For example, out of the non-linear drip paintings of Pollock, Helen Frankenthaler for one has developed a style that is diffuse and feathery; her poured (and brushed) marks give her surfaces a soft, ruffled appearance which is inconceivable without Pollock's lead, however different her handling of it has become. Frankenthaler, like Pollock in the drip paintings, creates loose-jointed works which stretch out discursively, like stages of a journey, the opposite of centred paintings. As they expand or unroll the blots and rivulets hover and float in an imagery possessive, for all its obliqueness, of organic imagery. Landscapes and anatomies can be connected with the paint, not in terms of verifiable description but in terms of rumour and analogy.

Sam Francis, who thinks that art critics are like pirates on a banana boat, eating the bananas and tossing the skins into the wind (and I quote), has not yet daunted all criticism. In his works of the early 50's small repeated blobs of colour were put down very wet and allowed to run (and this technique has been standard for Francis ever since). These early works, all in one main colour, led to works with greater contrasts of tone and a greater range of colour, such as *Orange, Black, and Blue, 1956*. Drip technique does not mean here paint dropped onto a flat surface but rather paint applied by brush to an upright or slanted surface and allowed to run. The monotony of Francis' early works was like a car windscreen with rain hitting it, the pattern of the repetition of drops unlearnable despite their apparent uniformity. Later this version of Pollock's forever effect was lessened as Francis used much more distinct configurations. However, in a work of the mid-50's, such as *Orange, Black, and Blue*, the interplay of brushed and trickled paint, of hollowed planes and solid runnels, is typical of the technical expansion of traditional procedures that the drip method brought.

Robert Goodnough, himself a painter, has described how, when Pollock was at work on a large drip painting, 'within a half-hour the entire surface had taken on an activity of weaving rhythms'. By rapidly animating the surface with marks that grow naturally out of human gesture

—Continued on page 34

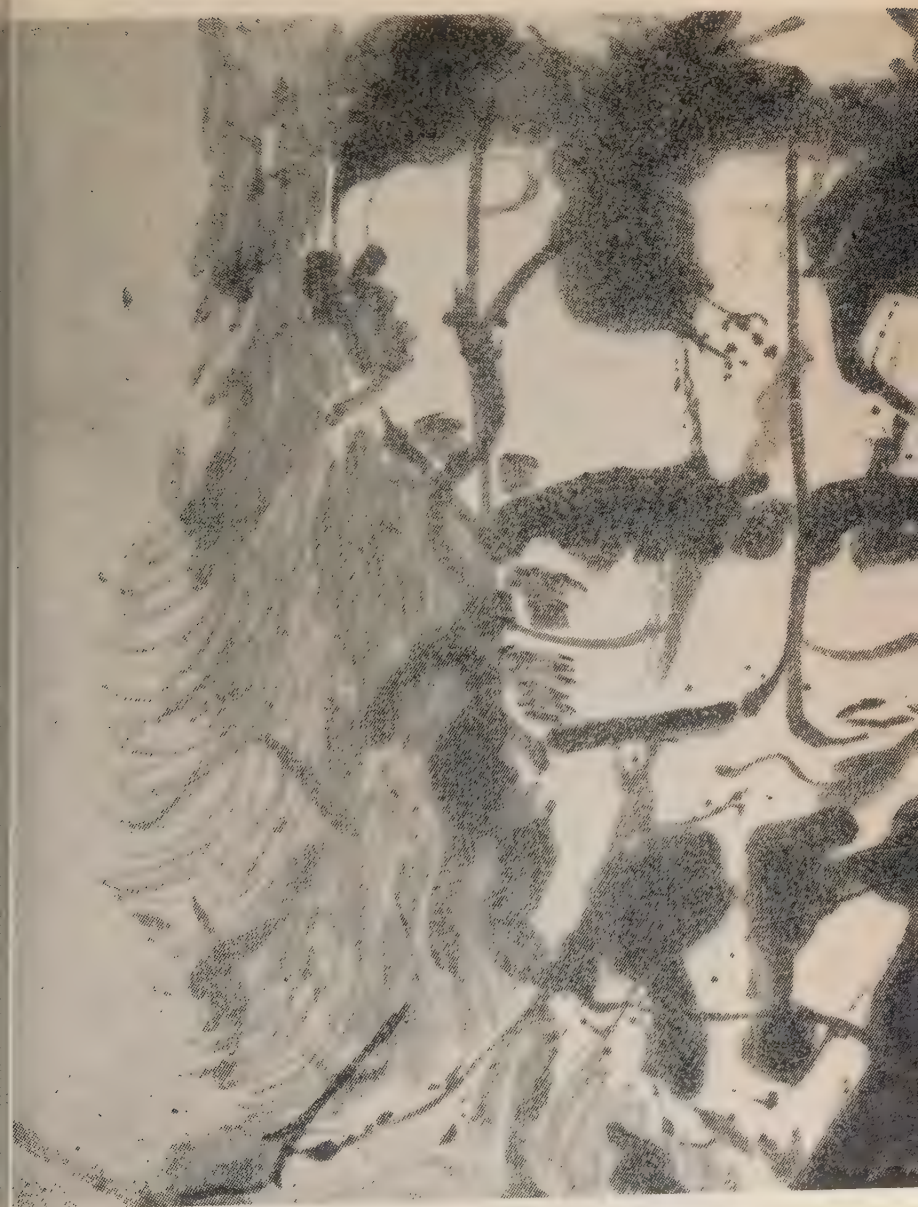


*Sam Francis : Peterscope 1960*

*Courtesy of USIS*

*Helen Frankenthaler : New York Bamboo 1957*

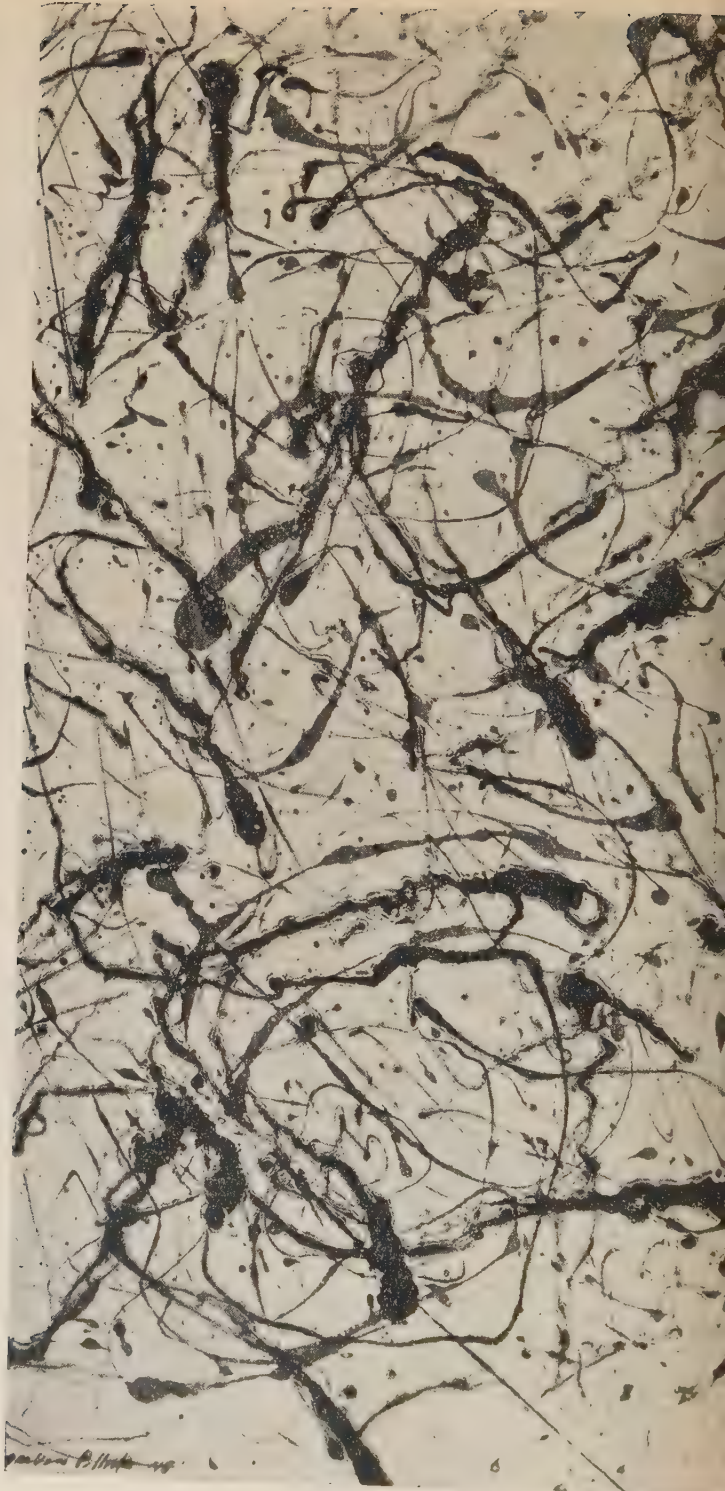
*Courtesy of USIS*





*Jackson Pollock:*  
*Black, White*  
*and Grey, 1948*

*Courtesy of*  
*Marlborough*  
*Fine Art*

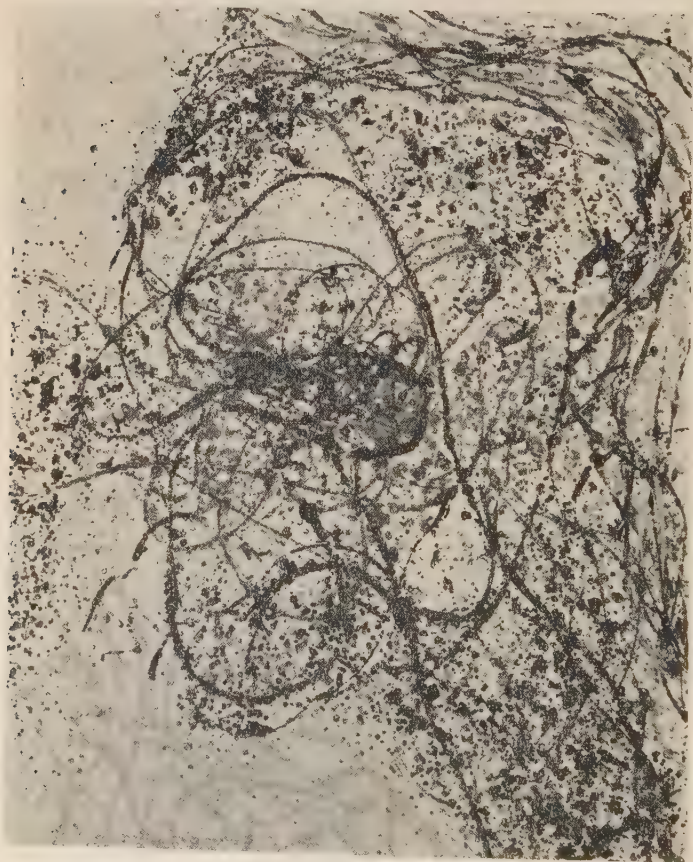




*Jackson Pollock : 26. 1951*

*Courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art*

and human reach, Pollock carried the painting and himself along in a mutual relationship of exceptional closeness. By covering the surface with gestural marks he made the painting into a highly responsive field. These marks, though conditioned by his experience as a painter, had a higher than usual degree of unpredictability about them, than, say, paint applied by an artist's brush. Put schematically the relation between the artist and his work, in terms of the drip technique, goes something like this: he makes a mark; this mark suggests another one. As the visible record of what has been done increases, it carries with it a possible future which the artist recognises and works towards, though he has not anticipated its exact form. Each mark he makes changes the marks that have already been made and the improvisatory nature of the technique, though it permits revision, demands an intimate response to the emerging physiognomy of the painting.



*Asger Jorn : Yggdrassel Man, 1961    Courtesy of Tooths*





*Allan Kaprow : Escalator*

## Sunday Afternoon

The policeman, who was after all an agent of the law, pointed a thick finger at the one remaining building that stood in the desert of bricks and broken window glass. "Mrs. Blood's," he said. "You guys know her?" We said nothing and the policeman put his finger down. "Old bitch won't sell her place and she's the only one." Like the boys who played in the lot behind us, he picked up a brick and flung it haphazardly at the red brick house that was about a quarter of a mile away. "We could have a gorgeous park here," he said. "Office buildings, new apartments – the works. They'd better get her out." He lifted his shoulders and he turned to us. "You guys know her?"

We shook our heads this time, no. And we tried to look upstanding, and understanding, while behind our backs we joined hands in an emphatic burst of sympathy for Mrs. Blood, sole inhabitant of a lost land. The front door of her house was tied close with string (Mrs. Blood used the cellar door when she made her sporadic, guarded visits to the A & P) because the lock had rusted and wouldn't lock, but there was a fire escape, and there was central heating. Mrs. Blood knew her City Planning Commission. "You can't get me out," she told the Urban Studies people who came to speak to her about a home in some other part of Boston. "I got my fire escape and we even got central heating. Plumbing works too." So there was no chalk "X" on the side of Mrs. Blood's house. A steamshovel knocked part of her chimney down (by mistake) when they were demolishing the grocery store on the corner of her old street, but Mrs. Blood got her son-in-law, a housepainter, to fix it before the city could tell her that her furnace was condemned. She flew an American flag from her front bedroom window, but it only had forty-eight stars on it because Mrs. Blood had stopped walking to the station for newspapers as soon as the steamshovel knocked down her chimney. That was in the beginning of 1958. "Damn Barbara Frietchie," said the cop, and smiled suddenly, his big face becoming pleasant, almost beautiful, because the smile looked so strange. Our hands went ecstatic behind our backs; Hal pretended he was going to break my arm and nearly broke his camera instead. The arm of the law swept out and grabbed the camera, which Hal was clutching between his elbow and his ribs. "Nice job," said the policeman. "You better hold on to it." He put the camera over Hal's shoulder again, making sure to tuck it under the trenchcoat's attaching shoulder strap. Hal tried to smile thank-you, but he did a pretty poor job of it because the camera was on the wrong shoulder – the left one, that is – and was resting right on top of his old army wound, right on the place where a piece of shrapnel had been embedded in his flesh, back in South Korea in 1952 when he was a lad of eighteen. He tried to undo the shoulder strap but the policeman had buckled it wrong – upside-down, if you know what I mean – and it took him a little while. He wouldn't let me touch him. He just said, "Come on," and started walking away. I ran after him and yelled good-bye to the cop, who was staring at Mrs. Blood's house again. When I turned around a few minutes later he was walking after us, but we lost him by the time we had crossed the lot. He

stopped to talk to the kids who were playing on top of the largest pile of cast-off lumber and bricks I ever saw in my life. Right at the bottom of the pile there was a whole lot of cracked glass, and I think he was afraid they would fall on it. Instead, the kids would crawl up one side of the pile of bricks so that they could appear at the top and scare the pigeons that were lighting on the glass and brushing their wings on it. Every time the pigeons' feet hit the glass they made this funny squeaking *wistful* kind of sound, and the kids couldn't *stand* it. Every time they heard it they would let out these little screams, and hug themselves with both hands around their shoulders. It was as if they had their own little city, those kids, with all those piles of bricks and lumber. Away from Mrs. Blood's house, at the edge of the lot, there were some streets where all the buildings hadn't been completely torn down. They were all empty though, and I know those kids played in them because the cop complained about them before he started going on about Mrs. Blood. He said they were always in those houses. He said they never went home for supper, even.

Hal walked so fast that I couldn't keep up with him, and besides I kept tripping over things in that lot. I began feeling kind of sick, the way I used to feel when I used to go walking with my father on week-ends. I was just a little kid then, and a pretty slow walker. He didn't mean to make me unhappy, but he would start thinking about things and get so excited with his thoughts he wouldn't notice how fast he was walking. I do the same thing now myself. But I used to see him walking ahead of me and I would feel as if my lungs would burst. I still hate it when someone I'm walking with walks too fast. I wanted to call Hal, but I was afraid that if I opened my mouth my lungs would burst. But he stopped right at the edge of this lot, in front of an old school.

It had been an elementary school until the City Planning Commission condemned it; now they were tearing it down, but slowly, slowly, because they wanted the slate that was on the roof. I never saw a kid in that school, I don't know why. Probably it was one of the most beautiful buildings left in Boston. It had been designed about fifty years before by Stanford White. For a while they didn't even want to tear it down, it was so beautiful. Big, everything about it was big – but it seemed airless. We walked inside together, past the wrought-iron fence and the gate that hung crooked, and up the steps that were *real* marble – and still perfect. I guess there was no door. Inside it was like every castle you ever dreamed of. Mostly because of the stairway, I suppose. The main stairway had two branches that began one on each side of the door and joined midway to the second floor. The steps were so high I never saw how any kid could have climbed them.

A dog came down the stairs the minute we came into the building; I suppose he lived there because he followed us around wherever we went inside, but he never followed us out. The first thing he did was make this kind of playful lunge at my right ankle, although I don't really think he would have bit me. He had a leather collar around his neck, even though it did look about twenty years old. Anyway, Hal sort of kicked him and then picked up a stick and began sort of barking back at him, and the dog shut up and left me alone. It was a pretty old dog, all black and fuzzy, with a white face and bloodshot eyes. I don't think it had any ears, now that I have to describe it. At least, I never saw them.



Before we went upstairs we looked in all these classrooms on the first floor. I think what impressed me about them was that they were so *big*. They were too big for those kids we saw in the lot – and they were too good, if you know what I mean. They weren't rooms for kids. Every room used to have eight chandeliers; now only the chains were left. I remember in my own elementary school there were eight chandeliers in the auditorium only, and I used to wonder what would happen if the chain that attached one of them to the ceiling finally broke. Sometimes I used to think about it all through the assembly periods, the ones that bored me. If I were sitting under one of them I didn't think about it too much though. Anyway, *every one* of these classrooms had eight chandeliers. Once had eight chandeliers. I don't even know if that old school is still standing.

At the top of every flight of stairs there was a Teachers' Lounge, a large round room with windows all around it and an archway leading into it. Every real door was missing, but "Teachers' Lounge" was stencilled in gold above the archway. Outside the windows there was a courtyard – a schoolyard, because home plate, first base, second base and third base were painted in white on the cement – and it was full of broken glass, like every other yard in that part of the city. I guess they just knocked all those lovely round windows out, floor by floor, and let the glass fall in the courtyard.

In one of these lounges Hal knocked about trying to get a picture of all that glass in the late afternoon sunlight. It was late afternoon. It was too much, you know, the whole thing. It was like a novel; it was like a documentary film. I started feeling really sad, about the people leaving their homes and about old Mrs. Blood refusing to leave and about all those little kids playing in these ruins. But I felt pretty dishonest about that kind of thing; like it wasn't happening to me, you know? I try to guard against too much romanticizing. It seems to me that I always sop up some fake misery with everything I do.

On every floor there were these classrooms, coming out from two long corridors that began on the far side of each branch of the stairway. Hal led the way down every corridor, and in the wall of every corridor there was a hole higher than a full-grown man, and about five times as wide. It was as if someone had thrown ten bombs at the building and made these enormous, gaping holes. We sat down on the floor of the left-hand corridor on the fourth floor, and dangled our feet over the edge of the hole, into the air. "I love this kind of thing," Hal said. For a long time even the dog was quiet. "What kind of thing?" I wondered, but I couldn't think of anything to say. I was quite happy because I knew I could go back to my own home, go back to my own school, and still hold on to this place, enough to keep me happy. Hal was happy because for some inexplicable reason he was as much at home among this wreckage as he would be in any home, in any school, with anybody. I suppose I knew that once crystallized the two happinesses were irreconcilable, and so I didn't say anything. Our feet dangled over the front of the school, and we could see the lot where the kids had been playing, only there was just one boy left now. He was paddling around on this long piece of wood, in the middle of this giant puddle, and he looked like some kind of god-damned war orphan. He was trying to propel himself with this *twig* or something. "Get a canoe mister," Hal whispered. He picked his

knees up, close to his chest, so that he could balance his camera on them. He leaned forward so far that I was afraid he'd lose his balance and topple over and out, but I was afraid to touch him. You know how some people are when you get in their way. He didn't move for a while though, and I noticed that there was another kid, a boy, sneaking up on the first one from behind this pile of garbage. I wondered first of all how the first kid couldn't see him, and then I remembered how little kids are. It made me feel pretty creepy for a minute, as if I were watching something I shouldn't be, and I thought I'd better yell and warn the first kid. But the second kid yelled before I could. "Hoot," he said. That first kid turned around fast, you can bet. And got his feet all wet in that puddle too. It's just as well I didn't yell. Those kids would have been panicked out of their minds if they had seen us, hanging up there in the air. By the way, I don't know if I mentioned that is was the dead of winter and those kids were only wearing summer jackets. I was getting pretty cold and I was wearing two sweaters and a coat.

I could tell you a lot of things about that school that you would like. For one thing, there was a tower on each end, with a turret at the top, and a special staircase for each one. For another, one of the classrooms had some of the panes knocked out of one of the windows, but some of them still in, so that you could see the red brick of the building next door both bright and cloudy – like a Mondrian maybe. But you know, it got cold – too cold for me. I wasn't *that* warmly dressed. There are worlds and worlds, if you know what I mean. After a while you want your own bed. We climbed to the top of the tower on the right side, and suddenly I had had enough. I don't think I ever saw Boston look so beautiful; I don't think I ever saw so much of Boston at once. The sun was just setting and it glistened on the spire of Trinity Church and the whole bit. And there we were, getting a bird's-eye view of the backyards of Beacon Hill, if you like. I could see old Mrs. Blood's house – but suddenly I didn't care about Mrs. Blood any more. "Come on," I said, looking down. "It's too dark now to take pictures anyway." As if I didn't know how much of a prop that camera was.

Hal rested his hand on the iron stair railing and said nothing, but he belonged – he belonged so eloquently that I couldn't say anything more. Finally he took the camera off his shoulder and put it in my hands, as if he didn't notice what he was doing. "We'll go soon, baby," he said. Then he turned and looked at me fully for the first time all afternoon. He considered me, purposefully, purposefully, like a man making a choice. It was too much; I couldn't bear it. He was such a fake, you know, but such a *real* fake. "You go down first, baby," he said, so gently. "I guess I'll be down soon." For all the epithets that rang in my throat, I couldn't betray the plot. It was too much. Instead, I tied the hood of my jacket under my chin, adjusted the camera on my shoulder, and turned and walked very slowly down the narrow stairs.

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# The Toothache

Toothache on top of all this was too much. He had always taken great care of his teeth, even as a child. A child. His marriage was two months old and he wished that he was. Fifty years had passed in as many days. That made him seventy three. Another two to go. His life was almost over. He had come to the right place. The door was divided, like a double door, into two equal leaves. He knocked on the upper leaf, a frosted glass panel with the name and profession in heavy black capitals. The upper half opened. A clean, florid face appeared and disappointment pricked him.

—Yes ?

—Would you . . . attend to this for me, please ?

The slip of paper was carefully scrutinised. Himself. The paper. Himself.

—Are you the father ?

—Yes.

—Come in.

The lower half of the door was unlatched to admit him into a room which seemed half church, half office. The ecclesiastical half was neat and shining, the official half untidy, strewn with papers. Nameless brass projections hung on the walls and looked as if they had been looted from a church. There were glossy photographs of the rest chapels in the city's sematoria. The funeral director busied himself among his littered papers, and, in a few minutes, with the air of having solved a problem, pronounced, as if he expected his client to haggle :

—That will be three pounds ten, young man.

—Yes.

He drew four new pound notes from his wallet, crossed the room, and placed them emphatically beneath the undertaker's eyes.

—It will be tomorrow. Will anyone attend ?

—No.

—Has it got a name ?

—No.

—Shall I inform you of the place of burial ?

—No . . . thank you.

—Some people like to know, but best forgotten.

—If the child had lived only a few days or weeks it would have had a name. And a stone.

He felt he was apologising for not bringing better trade.

—A different matter. But best forgotten.

He seemed to have solved a problem.

—It doesn't often happen these days.

He wondered how much a child of a few months would cost.

—Right. I'll see to it tomorrow for you.

—Thank you.

He turned to go. The business completed, the undertaker moved from the official to the ecclesiastical side of the room, and took his hand.

—Put it there. I know what it is. I'm a family man myself.

With his other hand the undertaker held out a small receipt for three pounds ten and a crumpled ten shilling note. He took them and went through the divided door.

—Good afternoon.

—Good afternoon, young man.

It had been the same with the registrar of births and deaths, when he had collected the certificate for disposal at the hospital that morning. Names. Dates of Birth. 1937. 1937. Professions. Schoolteacher. Schoolteacher. The registrar wrote the date of the stillbirth. 19 February, 1960.

—When were you married ?

—December the Sixteenth.

—Nineteen Fifty Eight ?

—No, last year.

The registrar smiled. Who had selected him to endure this ? Time ? Like an ever rolling stream. There was comfort in that. His tooth ached. No comfort. There was time to kill before his dental appointment. There was always time to kill. You stood in the present and watched either the last moment die or the next being born. As they were ejaculated into being, his mind, like a spermicide, killed off the seeds of time. All *his* moments were dying. When you were seventy three you could only look behind you. At that age you walked backwards into the future. There was time to kill before his dental appointment, before he died. He would walk.

To reach the dentist's, which he had not thought to change, he had to walk from Town to Beeston, up the long hill that overlooked the rest of Leeds. It was very near his old home. Since he had left so abruptly he had not returned. The lack of forgiveness would remain mutual. His resentment would consume his guilt. Supposing he was seen ? Let them see him. Supposing he saw his mother at the greengrocer's on the corner ? He would ignore her. He had written a terse postcard to tell them about the child and that was all. They would say it was a judgement. Besides if you were seventy three, your parents would be dead. All the names that had been heaped on them ! All the fragments of morality that had fallen about their heads ! The fifth and the seventh commandments. They had burned his photograph and the Bible he had kept at his bedside. Such as he had no right to possess that, let alone read it. It had only been an ornament anyway. A tit bit. A miniature edition, inscribed *Joseph Carson, 1841*. He had picked it up in the market for a few pence, buried under the battered copies of Marie Corelli, Ouida and Hall Caine.

After only two months of absence the familiar streets showed signs of considerable change. Instead of the lines of gas lamps he was shocked to find overhead sodium lighting, and there was demolition in progress on a row of terrace houses, almost the same as his own street. He stopped to watch. There was time to kill. Ahead of him a man on crutches stood watching the houses being torn down. That had not changed. The afternoons were always peopled by mothers and children under five, or by the aged and the maimed. All the able-bodied, like the demolition men, were at work. He himself would be back at school tomorrow morning. After

is slight indisposition. A chill? A bilious attack? The blood on the stair, the floor of the ambulance, the attendants' hands. At his feet on a pile of broken bricks, open at page 305, lay the grey remnants of *The Beauties of British Poetry*:

'The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,  
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;'

He turned the stiffened pages with his foot. Another by Lord Byron. Mrs. Hemans. Hogg. Two men with sledgehammers were poised on a high fragment of surviving wall. They might easily fall and kill themselves. This part of the city had worn badly. It was good to see it go. How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! Seventy three. Fifty years *had* passed. You could expect changes in fifty years. Every change after fourteen years was for the worst. A plaque on the site testified that the work was being carried out by a member of *The National Federation of Demolition Contractors*. On it was a badge with a map of the British Isles. Great Britain and Ulster were in black. On the circumference of the badge, surmounting the Outer Hebrides, was a contractor's crane. A shovel intersected Sligo and traversed Ireland as far as County Cork, where it emerged into the ocean. A pick in the North Sea had its point curved towards some coastal town beneath the Firth of Forth. A crowbar, its point of balance opposite the Isle of Wight, floated in the English Channel, extending, at a rough guess, from Plymouth to Brighton. Beneath all this was the date, 1941, (he was four), and beneath that the motto, RESURGAM. The cripple had moved off. He overtook him quickly, imagining the cripple's envy at his straight, retreating legs. He turned round. The cripple's head, as if it always had, hung, like a cartoon Christ's, upon his breast.

He was nearer to his old home. You could see almost all of Leeds from the crest of Beeston Hill, the roofs, the chimneys and the steeples, the higher civic buildings, the clock of the black Town Hall, to which he had listened, in his attic bedroom, striking the small hours of those mornings immediately before he left. The slightest earth tremor could level them. He could see the familiar landmarks that he had passed on his way up. The Salem Institute, Hudson's Warehouse, formerly Wesley Hall, the gas cylinders, the truncated pinnacles of Christ Church. Some time ago, these had become insecure and the constant passage of heavy and rapidly increasing traffic had made them a danger to the community. The incumbent had sat for weeks at a trestle table, with placards ranged about him and fixed above the church porch on either side of what seemed to be a tinted photograph of Christ, beneath which was written in white capitals, COME UNTO ME. Who would go to that? The faded figure held out its arms in a gesture of welcome. AN APPEAL FOR RENOVATIONS TO THE FABRIC OF THE CHURCH. £10,000 URGENTLY NEEDED. PLEASE GIVE GENEROUSLY. SAVE YOUR CHURCH. Hardly a tithe was raised and, with no regard for proportion, the dangerous finials and crockets were removed, leaving four stunted growths of stone, projecting from a square tower. They should have left them to fall down. Nearer to him was the large dome of a building, formerly The Queen's Theatre, The Music Hall, the Queen's Cinema, now an unwanted fixture, described as an excellent site for future development, becoming more and more dilapidated, devoid of players, stars or



audience. Of the advertisement board above the entrance, between what had been two giant tulips, there remained only the word, TODAY. Just visible below, however, the Palace Cinema, formerly The Tabernacle, was still assertive. Its prices had risen, so they said, from fourpence to one and six or two and three. It had risen in the world. The city was senile too. Let the everlasting stars go out. They would all pass away as one, a slow driftage of stardust, crumbled brick and plaster, powdered flesh and bone.

The dentist had his surgery in Cemetery Road on the very brow of the commanding hill. In the congested burial ground on his left the remains of his family from seventeen something were laid at rest, the butchers, the publicans, their wives, and some of their children. His father took flowers there almost every week and sometimes came home with the stains of clay on his trouser knees. The five sons, now dispersed in various parts of England, sent every year, with their Christmas Cards, a subscription towards an elaborate wreath.

From the chair, as he was having his teeth tested and found wanting, he fixed his attention on the landmarks below him, to distract his mind from the pains of the dentist's probe. Four of his teeth required treatment. Three new fillings and one about twelve years old that needed repair. He had forgotten about that. The tooth that ached was not to be extracted. It would just be possible to fill it. Of course, they were paid more for a filling.

—Do you still clean your teeth regularly ?

—Yes, of course. After every meal.

—And you don't eat sweets ?

—No.

—Or a lot of biscuits ?

—No. No.

—Mm. Your teeth are poorly resistant to decay.

They gave you nothing to numb the pain of drilling. No cocaine. No laughing gas. The drill began. He stared at the heavens and the higher landmarks. He pinched his hand beneath the protective sheet. Birds circled within his vision, circumscribed by the tilted position of the chair, seagulls fleeing the storms on the North Sea or the Irish Sea, sparrows, starlings circling the stunted pinnacles of Christ Church, the dome of the Queen's Theatre, the Music Hall, the Queen's Cinema, the derelict, wheeling backwards and forwards above the Gas Works cylinders, the Salem Institute, and, nearer, settling on the houses on the hill immediately beneath the window. Concentrate. Transfer the pain into the hand. The birds soar as the pain is sharp on the crumbling tooth. They settle and it is subdued. The drill. The drill. They rise, they wheel and turn, around the stunted pinnacles, poorly resistant to decay, the Queen's Theatre, poorly resistant to decay, the Queen's Cinema, poorly resistant to decay, the derelict, the excellent site for future development, for future buildings, future derelicts, that will survive my teeth, my flesh and bone, my son, who died before he saw the broken world, that may survive my second or my third, their first, or be demolished, excavated, filled, plucked out, root and all, teeth and children torn out of their roots, the nameless flesh interred in nameless ground, the dead to judgement torn, Christ torn from the tomb, the roots, the judgement, the welcoming, the faded Christ,

poorly resistant to decay. Houses of people, of plays and pictures, and of prayer. Of prayer, like the birds, the birds in flight, that will not settle that this pain be stopped. Poorly resistant to decay. Slum clearance, demolition, and repairs, the plans of councillors and clerks, citizens and clergy, the aimless cockroach and the mouse, the pick, the crowbar, the shovel, the contractor's crane. The area of Great Britain dark, blacked out. Seventeen something. 1841. 1937. 1941. 1951. 1961. *Resurgam*. They rise. The pains. Love, poorly resistant to decay, like birds and pain together, rises, falls. Again, it rises, poorly resistant to decay, pain inseparable from flight. It must. Poorly resistant to decay, they fold their wings and perch on blackened houses and on generations, poorly resistant to decay. *Resurgam*. World without end. I will arise on painful or on broken wings.

Had he not been advised to eat nothing for three hours, he would have bought a penny apple at the greengrocer's on the corner, as he had done regularly when he was a boy. They were good for the teeth. There were holly wreaths, left over from Christmas, hanging in the shop.

—Hello, stranger. Not seen you for ages. Your mother told us you were married now. Says you've got yourself a nice girl. You're a dark horse. How are things?

His mouth was sore. He smiled painfully.

—Fine.

—Good. Just off to your mother's then?

—No. I'm just coming back. I want you to send two lots of flowers for me, if you would. One home. You know the address. With love. And the other to . . . no, never mind. I'll take the others myself.

Bearing a bunch of many coloured flowers, he caught an almost empty bus down Beeston Hill, along Victoria Road, and beneath the Dark Arches into City Square. There he walked past the dark horse itself, mounted by the Black Prince. There were sparrows perched on the horse's mane and on the Prince and, in bronze, a falcon brooded on his arm. It was growing dark. The naked nymphs, Morn and Eve, were bearing lighted lamps above their heads. Past the statues of Dr. Priestley and Dean Hook. Over the square the wayside pulpit of Mill Hill Chapel bore its weekly message: **POLITENESS IS LIKE AN AIR CUSHION. THERE'S NOTHING IN IT, BUT IT EASES THE JOINTS WONDERFULLY.** They were going to rebuild the square. He caught another bus which took him past Quarry Hill Flats and Oastler House, past nameless lit and unlit windows, industrious or unfinished premises, darkened churches, cinemas, tall scaffolding and abandoned homes, and from the stop opposite the Cemetery Tavern, he walked through the lodge gates into the hospital waiting-room. They were seated indiscriminately on wooden benches, the joyful, the anxious, and the near bereaved, waiting for the gatekeeper to admit them to see their dying for the last time, their sick, or their recently delivered. Was it true, as he scanned the faces, that those who were elated slightly subdued their joy, for the sake of those who were anxious or in mourning, and that those who were ridden with anxiety or bereavement allowed a little real or dissembled radiance to appear on their faces, for the sake of the elated, the fathers? If it was, then it was as it should be, and he belonged to both.

T. W. HARRISON. Born Leeds 1937. His poems have appeared in *STAND* and other periodicals, and have been broadcast.

# Transgression in Marriage and in Orgy

*Marriage seen as a transgression and the* *JUS PRIMAE NOCTIS.*

Marriage is most often thought of as having little to do with eroticism.

We use the word eroticism every time a human being behaves in a way strongly contrasted with everyday standards and behaviour. Eroticism shows the other side of a façade of unimpeachable propriety. Behind the façade are revealed the feelings, parts of the body and habits we are normally ashamed of. It must be stressed that although this aspect has apparently nothing to do with marriage it has in fact always been present in it.

Marriage in the first place is the framework of legitimate sensuality. "Thou shalt not perform the carnal act except in matrimony alone." In even the most puritan societies marriage is not questioned. But I have in mind the quality of transgression that persists at the very basis of marriage. This may seem a contradiction at first, but we must remember other cases of transgression entirely in keeping with the general sense of the law transgressed. Sacrifice particularly is in essence, as we have seen, the ritual violation of a taboo; the whole process of religion entails the paradox of a rule regularly broken in certain circumstances. I take marriage to be a transgression then; this is a paradox, no doubt, but laws that allow an infringement and consider it legal are paradoxical. Hence just as killing is simultaneously forbidden and performed in sacrificial ritual, so the initial sexual act constituting marriage is a permitted violation.

Near relations having exclusive rights over sisters and daughters would perhaps relinquish these rights to strangers who, coming from outside, had a kind of irregularity about them that qualified them to undertake that act of transgression which the first act of intercourse in marriage was taken to be. This is only a hypothesis, but if we want to see how marriage fits into the sphere of eroticism such a possibility is not to be neglected. In any case, that there is a feeling of transgression about marriage is a matter of everyday experience; popular wedding celebrations alone make that much clear. Sexual intercourse in marriage or outside it has always something of the nature of a criminal act, particularly where a virgin is concerned, and always to some extent when it takes place for the first time. With this in mind I think it makes sense to talk about a certain power of transgression a stranger would have and a man living in the same community would not possess.

Recourse to a power of transgression not possessed by the first comer seems generally to have been favoured, especially on serious occasions like the violation of the taboo making copulation a shameful thing when it is practised with a woman for the first time. That operation would often be entrusted to men who, unlike the bridegroom, had the authority to transgress. They must have had a quality of sovereignty in some way or another that protected them from the taboo valid for mankind in general. The priesthood would be the obvious choice, but in the Christian world it was out of the question to have recourse to God's ministers, and the custom of entrusting the defloration to the lord grew up.<sup>1</sup> Sexual inter-

1. In any case the *jus primae noctis* which the feudal lord affected as the sovereign power in his own domain was not as has been thought the outrageous privilege of a tyrant whom no one dared resist. At least it did not originate in that way.



course or the initial act at least was evidently considered forbidden and dangerous, but the lord or the priest had the power to touch sacred things without too great a risk.

### *Repetition*

The erotic side or, more simply, the transgressional aspect of marriage often escapes notice because the word *marriage* describes both the act of getting married and the state of being married; we forget the former and must think of the latter. Besides, the economic value of women has long made the state of marriage the most important thing; calculations, expectations and results have focussed interest on the state at the expense of the intensity of feeling that characterises the brief moment of the act. It is different in kind from the expectations it raises – the home, the children and the domestic activity which will result.

The most serious thing is that habit dulls intensity and marriage implies habit. There is a remarkable connection between the innocence and the absence of danger offered by repeated intercourse (the first act being the only one to fear) and the absence of value on the level of pleasure generally associated with this repetition. This is no negligible connection: it has to do with the very essence of eroticism. But the full flowering of sexual life is not negligible either. Without the intimate understanding between two bodies that only grows with time, conjunction is furtive and superficial, unorganised, practically animal and far too quick, and often the expected pleasure fails to come. A taste for constant change is certainly neurotic, and certainly can only lead to frustration after frustration. Habit, on the other hand, is able to deepen the experiences that impatience scorns to bother with.

With repetition the two opposing viewpoints are complementary. Without a doubt, the aspects, the signs and the symbols which give eroticism its richness demand a certain basic irregularity. Carnal life would be a poor thing not far removed from the animals' heavy-footed endeavours if it had never been indulged in with a fair amount of freedom in response to capricious urges. While it is true that sexual life blossoms with habit, it is hard to say how far a happy life prolongs the sensations aroused in the first instance by a troubled impulse or revealed by forbidden explorations. Habit itself owes something to the higher pitch of excitement dependant on disorder and rule-breaking. We can ask whether the deep love kept alive in marriage would be possible without the contagion of illicit love, the only kind able to give love a greater force than that of law.

### *Ritual orgy*

In any case the orderly framework of marriage provides only a narrow outlet for pent-up violence.

Apart from marriage, feast days provided opportunities for rule-breaking and at the same time made possible normal life dedicated to orderly activity. Even the "holiday on the death of a king" I mentioned fixed a limit in time to apparently boundless disorder in spite of its prolonged and amorphous nature. Once the royal remains had become a skeleton, disorder and excess ceased to prevail and taboos came into force once more. Ritual orgies often connected with less disorderly feasts allowed for only a furtive interruption of the taboo on sexual behaviour. Often the licence extended only to members of a fraternity, as in the Dionysic Feasts, but it might well have a more precise religious connotation

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transcending eroticism. We do not know exactly what used to happen : we can always imagine a heavy vulgarity taking the place of frenzy. But it is no use denying the possibility of a state of exaltation composed of the intoxication commonly accompanying the orgy, erotic ecstasy and religious ecstasy.

In the orgy the celebration progresses with the overwhelming force that usually brushes all bonds aside. In itself the feast is a denial of the limits set on life by work, but the orgy turns everything upside-down. It is not by chance that the social order used to be turned topsy-turvy during the Saturnalia, the master serving the slave, the slave lolling on the master's bed. These excesses derive their most acute significance from the ancient connection between sensual pleasure and religious exaltation.

There is nothing of this sort in the rudimentary eroticism of marriage. Transgression, yes, whether violent or not; but transgression in marriage without consequence, it is independent of other developments, possible games, no doubt, but not imposed by custom and even frowned on by custom. One might just possibly consider the vogue of dirty jokes in our own day as having something of the marriage ceremony about it at a popular level, but this custom implies an inhibited eroticism turned into sportive sallies, sly allusions and humorous double meanings. Sexual frenzy though, with its religious overtones, is the true stuff of orgies. A very old aspect of eroticism is seen in the orgy. Orgiastic eroticism is by nature a dangerous excess whose explosive contagion is an indiscriminate threat to all sides of life. The original rites made the Maenads devour their own nursing infants in their ferocious frenzy. Later on this abomination was echoed in the bloody omophagia of kids first suckled by the Maenads.

The orgy is not associated with the dignity of religion, extracting from the underlying violence something calm and majestic compatible with profane order; its potency is seen in its ill-omened aspects, bringing frenzy to its wake and a vertiginous loss of consciousness. The total personality is involved, reeling blindly towards annihilation, and this is the decisive moment of religious feeling. All this occurs within the framework of man's secondary assent in the measureless proliferation of life. The refusal implied by taboos confines the individual within a miserly isolation compared with the vast disorder of creatures lost in each other, whose very violence lays them open to the violence of death. From another standpoint the suspension of taboos sets free the exuberant surge of life and favours the unbounded orgiastic fusion of those individuals. This fusion can in no way be limited to that attendant on the plethora of the genital organs. It is a religious effusion first and foremost; it is essentially the disorder of lost beings who oppose no further resistance to the frantic proliferation of life. That enormous unleashing of natural forces seems to be divine, so high does it raise man above the condition to which he has condemned himself of his own accord. Wild cries, wild violence of gesture, wild dances, wild emotions as well, all in the grip of an immeasurably convulsive turbulence. The cataclysm ahead would demand this flight into the regions where all individuality is shed, where the stable elements of human activity disappear and there is no firm foothold anywhere to be found.

### *The orgy as an agrarian ritual*

The orgies of archaic peoples are usually interpreted in a way that completely bypasses everything that I have tried to show. Before pro-



ceeding, then, I must discuss the traditional interpretation which tends to reduce them to rituals of contagious magic. The men who ordained these orgies did indeed believe that they ensured the fertility of the fields. No one doubts that this is so. But the whole story has not been told if practices which far surpass the necessities of an agrarian rite are explained only in terms of that rite. Even if orgies had at all times and everywhere had this meaning one would still be justified in enquiring whether this was their only meaning. To perceive the agrarian aspect of a custom is indisputably of interest in that it thereby becomes part of the history of agricultural civilisation, but it is ingenuous to see all the action accounted for by a belief in their efficacy. Work and material utility have certainly determined, or at any rate conditioned, the behaviour, religious as well as profane, of semi-civilised peoples. But that does not mean that an extravagant custom derives specifically from a wish to make plantations fertile. Work set up the distinction between the sacred and the profane. It is the origin of the taboos which made man deny nature. On the other hand, the limits of the working world supported and maintained in the struggle against nature by those taboos also delineated the sacred world. In one way the sacred world is nothing but the natural world persisting in so far as it cannot be entirely reduced to the order laid down by work, profane order, that is. But the sacred world is only the natural world in one sense. In another it transcends the earlier world made up of work and taboos. In this sense the sacred world is a denial of the profane, yet it also owes its character to the profane world it denies. The sacred world is also the result of work in that its origin and significance are to be sought not in the immediate existence of nature's creation but in the birth of a new order of things, brought about in turn by the opposition to nature of the world of purposeful activity. The sacred world is separated from nature by work; it would be unintelligible for us if we did not see how far work determines its nature and existence.

The human mind formed by work would usually attribute to action a usefulness analogous to that of work. In the sacred world the explosion of violence suppressed by a taboo was regarded not only as an explosion but also as an action, and was considered to have some use. Originally such explosions, like war or sacrifice or orgies, were not calculated ones. But as transgressions perpetrated by men they were organised explosions, they were actions whose possible use appeared as a secondary consideration and was not contested.

The effects of war as an act were of the same order as the effects of work. In sacrifice there came into play forces to which consequences were arbitrarily attributed, just as if the force were that of a tool handled by a man. The effects attributed to orgies are of a different order. In human affairs example is catching. A man enters the dance because the dance makes him dance. A contagious action, and this one really is contagious, was thought to affect not only other men but nature as well. So sexual activity, which can be considered by and large as growth, as I have said, was thought to encourage growth in vegetation.

But only secondarily is transgression an action undertaken because of its usefulness. In war, in sacrifice or in orgies, the human mind arranged a convulsive explosion, banking on the real or imaginary result. War is not a political enterprise in origin, nor sacrifice a piece of magic. Similarly the orgy did not originate in the desire for abundant crops.

The origins of war, sacrifice and orgy are identical; they spring from the existence of taboos set up to counter liberty in murder or sexual violence. These taboos inevitably shaped the explosive surge of transgression. All this does not mean that recourse was never had to the orgy – or war, or sacrifice – for the sake of the results rightly or wrongly attributed to them. But in that case it was a secondary and inevitable business of frantic violence hurled in among the wheels of human activity as organised by work.

Violence in these conditions is no longer a purely natural and animal affair. The explosion preceded by anguish takes on a divine significance transcending immediate satisfaction. It has become a religious matter. But in the same movement it also becomes human; it finds its place in the chain of cause and effect that communal efforts have been built up upon the foundation of work.

This is an extract from the book *Eroticism*, by Georges Bataille, to be published this autumn by John Calder in a translation by Mary Dalwood. It first appeared in 1957, published by *Les Editions de Minuit* in Paris.

Referring to the arguments over the significance of the Lascaux cave paintings, which he discusses in the preface to a book of reproductions of these paintings, (*Lascaux, ou la Naissance de l'art*, Skira, 1955), Bataille says, "I decided that work must have implied from the beginning the existence of a world of work from which sexual life and murder and death in general were excluded." Taboos are the barriers man has erected for this purpose, but sometimes the violence of sex and death spill over in transgression. Beyond the barriers marking off the profane world of reason and of social order lies the sacred world, entering which man is stirred to the depths of his being.

Bataille examines some of the implications of this view in essays whose subjects range from a criticism of the Kinsey Reports to a consideration of the links between mysticism and sensuality, from the fusion of the male and female reproductive cells to the implications of the Marquis de Sade's philosophy, from war to prostitution.

Other books by Georges Bataille are *L'Expérience Intérieure* (1943), *Sur Nietzsche* (1945), *La Haine de la Poésie* (1947), *Manet* (1955), *Le Bleu du Ciel* (1957), *La Littérature et le Mal* (1957).

### III

After three months were up we spoke of it.  
My friend, whose faith had altered but not broken  
In lesser trials, I found wholly unshaken  
By the fact of her pregnancy. I was hard hit  
And showed it, I suppose; but my friend replied,  
“ Apparently it’s both God’s will and hers  
That she have a child by me. Can I oppose  
Such a concert of desires? Hardly! Besides,  
Her husband is impotent, or so she says :  
Who, then, in his right mind would call it sin ? ”  
I met her husband once . . . . He was a mild man,  
Small and polite before us rich white boys.  
I should have asked him what he thought about  
This delicate question; but I chickened out.

### IV

Silence, and clever questioning. These seem  
To have been the sole parts I chose to play –  
Fishing for details until nearly day,  
Then leaving you to sleep. And if you dreamed  
Of thorns and scourges in another life  
I never knew for sure, only that you  
Rarely passed up a chance to rendezvous  
With a colored woman who was someone’s wife.  
Silence, and posturing – and, above all,  
The sly pursuit of facts to stuff a poem . . . .  
Listen. I still believe you are to blame  
For whatever happens; but no longer call  
Your Christ to witness my own innocence,  
Seeing how I failed you more than once.

January – September, 1959

MICHAEL FRIED. American, born in N.Y.; Educated at Princeton  
and Merton College, Oxford. Rhodes Scholar.



## W. B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions

(Macmillan & Co., London, 1961) 36/-

This book is uniform with the recent editions of *Autobiographies* and *Mythologies*. It contains two works which have been all too long out of print, *Ideas of Good and Evil* and *The Cutting of an Agate*, but it also gives us Introductions to some of Yeats's books published between 1931 and 1936 as well as three Introductions not published before.

The *Introduction* to this volume, written in 1937, makes the point that we are in a silver age: 'There are poetry societies that understand what we never could, books of prosody, and the art schools are more intelligent every day'. It is truer today, when the libraries offer their silver for the poet's work sheets and the academic critic is ready to mull them over in order to aid his own career.

What then had a romantic poet to do with criticism? Yeats, reviewing his own critical prose, remarks that 'much seems an evasion, a deliberate turning away'. With this one can in part agree; there is an evasiveness, a tendency to a grandiloquent query or phrase at the end of an essay. In the earlier essays this probably stems from a desire to be impressive as well as from an enjoyment of the 'inner' meanings of what he writes. For instance, when he concludes an essay on William Morris with a reference to 'those who prepare the last reconciliation when the Cross shall blossom with roses', he is probably enjoying a reference to the tenets of the Rosicrucian society to which he belonged as well as ending off a very delightful essay with a flourish.

The strength of the essays he wrote deepened as he grew older, but here allusiveness replaces elusiveness. There was undoubtedly a side of Yeats which liked to puzzle readers. But there was infinitely more than this to Yeats's essays. They are affirmative gestures, less of a deliberate turning away than we might at first think. They are even courageous. His essay on Magic, for instance, nails defiantly to the mast three of his basic doctrines:

(1) That the borders of our minds are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.

(2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.

(3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols.

He will challenge, with a pugnacious aside, the accepted canons of scholarship or criticism; in his essay 'At Stratford-on-Avon' there is a typical tilt at Professor Dowden, his father's friend, who had not appreciated the significance, or even the possibilities of the Irish Renaissance. In contrast to the 'dried faggots' of scholarship he places the artistic sources of a poet: 'a certain scholar has told me', 'an old book affirms', etc.

What is the merit of these guestures? There is, first of all, the exciting quality of the writing. Few people in life surprise one frequently with new ideas or images or anecdotes or reflections. Yeats is one of these rare people. One is, happily, not sure what is coming next, and the rich

prose, studded with proper names and suggestive, stimulative symbols and images, adds to the impression of variety, of, even in the passages most weighed down by autumnal ninety-ishness, increasing and vital variety.

Then there is the ability of the poet to convey his own excitement at certain ideas. He writes always with particular intensity about Ireland; he has a physician's regard for her; however much she fails to respond to treatment he continues to work for her betterment. He writes brilliantly about poetry. The essay on 'Symbolism in Shelley's poetry' still is useful; his comment on the work of the Noh dramatists, or of Morris, or of Shelley, or of Spencer, still can stimulate us into fresh appraisals. He writes with generosity and penetration about the men and women he respects: Berkeley, Parnell, Synge, O'Leary, Lady Gregory. He writes too, in a way that allows us to appreciate his own poetry the more; and here these Essays are perhaps most valuable.

What is perhaps the most interesting development in critical studies since Livingstone Lowes wrote *The Road to Xanadu* is the ability of critics, armed in part with new psychological insights and diminished powers of reticence, in part with time and inclination to peruse manuscripts, source books, notebooks and even to rely in some cases upon the memories of surviving contemporaries of poets, to understand the workings of the poets' minds perhaps better than they ever did themselves. Did Joyce foresee the monumental work of Ellmann? Would Yeats have realised how much he gave away in some of his prose writings? And does the work of the critics detract from the actual work of the writers?

These questions are forcibly posed when one reads these essays of Yeats. The essays on 'An Indian Monk' and 'The Mandukya Upanishad' compel us to face the effect of Indian philosophy on Yeats's own poetry. Again, we can trace sources for poems from many of these essays; yet again we learn more of the man from reading them, and as he expresses himself so freely in his later poetry, so this can help our understanding of that poetry. Here is a passage on style which tells us a lot about Yeats's methods of composition:

I planned to write short lyrics or poetic drama where every speech would be short and concentrated, knit by dramatic tension, and I did so with more confidence because young English poets were at that time writing out of emotion at the monument of crisis, though their old slow-moving meditation returned almost at once. Then and in this English poetry has followed my lead, I tried to make the language of poetry coincide with that of passionate, normal speech. I wanted to write in whatever language comes most naturally when we soliloquise, as I do all day long, upon the events of our own lives or of any life where we can see ourselves for the moment. I sometimes compare myself with the mad old slum women I hear denouncing and remembering: 'How dare you'. I heard one say of some imaginary suitor, 'and you without health or home!' If I spoke my thoughts aloud they might be as angry and as wild. It was a long time before I had made a language to my liking; I began to make it when I discovered some twenty years ago that I must seek, not a Wordsworth thought, words in common use, but a powerful and passionate syntax, and a complete coincidence between period and stanza.

Throughout the essays there is evidence of the range and subtlety of Yeats's thought. He may have lost intellectual certainty when he shied away from taking Trinity Entrance and so failed to follow the family tradition of being educated there. (He regretted this deeply in later life). What he may have gained instead of disciplined accuracy is the extraordinary fusing power he had necessarily to develop as a poet, the power to weld together into effective, intense, and cohesive poetry material of very disparate kinds indeed.

This is not criticism as we often know it today. It springs from no outside compulsion or ambition (beyond that of writing in Ireland's service, upon occasion) but is a distillation of devotion to literature. It is not bad tempered nor is it gushing. It is a record of appreciative taste, catholic and unorthodox: a record of the original ideas of a man who saw the arts as a whole; who saw literature as a whole; and who read equally happily Balzac and Blake, Bhagwan Shri Hamsa and Boehme, Spenser and Synge, Maeterlinck and Morris. To read these *Essays* is to read part of the literary history of the 'eighties and 'nineties, part of Ireland's literary history, and part of one man's eclectic reading.

For Yeats was an active reader. He seized upon what he needed for the expression of his own ideas; he assimilated what he read and paid other writers the supreme compliment of writing about their thoughts as though he had made them his own. And his own thoughts, however wilful or egocentric they may at times seem, are never dull.

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# Iain Crichton Smith—Thistles and Roses

(Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1961). 10/6.

Iain Crichton Smith's first pamphlet of nineteen poems, *The Long River* (M. Macdonald, Edinburgh, 1955) was, more or less, an unashamedly romantic celebration of

That masterful persistence of the spirit  
That wears like a long river through the stone

Titles like *Prometheus*, and *The Dedicated Spirits* are indicative of the whole. The poet identified his own spirit with those of the heroes of *Calling The Roll*:

Those elemental ones who have  
burned the black grave away,  
Catullus Shelley-Burns  
Sappho Blake and Clare —

The volume represents the agony of many young and dedicated poets, who, feeling they have much to say, but having little means of saying it, connect immediately their powerful aspiration to the transcendent abstraction and the emotive mythology of stone and fire. Form is merely the shortest cut to the expression of the spirit and, even at that, an irksome constriction.

On such a night as this  
the spirit burns away  
in a blue Atlantic fire,  
seeking some living home  
beyond constricting form  
and the heavy stone that weeps  
above the dark abyss  
where all dead wishes are.

But the spirit, if it is dedicated and it is persistent, cannot in this vague way chafe for ever at the nameless image of the grave: a little shame-faced it begins to examine the inscriptions, to use its eyes, to inhabit flesh.

In *The White Noon*, his second collection, included by Edwin Muir, with those of Karen Gershon and Christopher Levenson, in *New Poets* 1959 (Eyre and Spottiswoode), Mr. Smith began to apply sharp correctives to the paraphernalia of the effusive spirit. In *In Luss Churchyard* and *For The Unknown Seamen of the 1939-45 War, Buried in Iona Churchyard*, the graves become objective facts, and, next door to these, are poems on old women, *Schoolteacher*, *The Widow*, *Statement by a Responsible Spinster*, the last two in *persona*. The abyss, where it survives, is carefully, perhaps too carefully, chaperoned by the sharp-eyed modern image:

knees would sink  
into the imponderable abyss  
where the one star burns *with a convulsive wink*  
in a white sky, *blown outwards like a bubble*.

The whole reads like a deliberate *imposition* of the visual image, the instrument of sharpness and precision, upon the spirit's natural inclination

to scorch the page and to pass on. The inevitable consequence is that of new patches on old cloth. The ingredients of the melting pot were not yet fused. Imposed rather than integral, the poet's images 'tend to pour cold water into the cauldron when his business is to make it boil'.

The struggle continues in *Thistles and Roses*, his latest collection. In this the images are less and less mere ballast, and yet we can still see the self-cured romantic both repressing and flirting with old attitudes in the same poem, or even the same line :

Nor did the trees adore you, that's quite silly.  
Nor did sweet birds trill your repeated name,  
all being busy heaving straws for nesting.  
How can June blossoms scatter praise or blame?

The cure is too self-conscious and too public. It is also responsible for blemishes that could only be made by a man engaged in this kind of struggle :

Someone made coffee, someone played the fool  
in a high rising voice for two hours.  
The sea's language was more grave and harsh.

In the third of *Three Sonnets*, from which the first quotation came, we are given the recipe for Mr. Smith's best poems and, indeed, for almost all good poems.

For fronting here a force so densely white,  
Shaken by grief I can restrain your motion  
By making reason and my passion fight.

And when this happens – although it does not here – we have *Old Woman*, a poem of bleak magnificence, to which all the earlier poems point, beginning with the protesting spirit burning up the grave, passing into the bodies and voices of old women, and now emerging into Mr. Smith's real voice. The poem fuses all the separate contrary elements that have torn the earlier poems apart, and really reads as if the poet felt the triumphant coming home of all the strays. One cannot, unfortunately, quote all the poem, but the conclusion shows how the vague Atlantic blue has thrown up an image of great power :

'Pray God,' he said, 'we ask you, God,' he said.  
The bowed back was quiet. I saw the teeth  
tighten their grip around a delicate death.  
And nothing moved within the knotted head

but only a few poor veins as one might see  
vague wishless seaweed floating on a tide  
of all the salty waters where had died  
too many waves to mark two more or three.

This above all is the poem in which all the tangled skeins of inspiration are most tightly drawn, and, except for *About That Mile*, whose conclusion,

I turn to poetry for such foolery.

is again the poet silencing his earlier self, and except for parts of other poems, none of the poetry approaches that of *Old Woman*. It is as if this triumph – by that halting progress of poetry – two steps forward and three back, had left those elements, which were conquered or, more correctly, enfranchised in this poem, to reassert themselves with renewed vigour. So often reason and passion do not fight, but only spar, and even, but less often, play a kind of tennis, where we can watch the ball



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being lobbed from one side to another. That this should be must also be partly caused by Mr. Smith's turning to his Scottish Puritan background for many of his themes. For while Puritanism can be a rigid corrective to the earlier vaporous romantic, it can also be a most inflammable fuel. The title *Thistles and Roses* indicates accurately enough the dichotomy at the root of its author's work. What one would really like to see is the rose with all its thorns or, alternatively, the thistle in full bloom.

This kind of dogged growth in a poet, like that in the later Yeats, is one of the most exciting and salutary to witness, and yet one has the persistent feeling that all three of Iain Crichton Smith's collections have been published too soon, that he has been unable to resist the attraction of collected publication for long enough to pull his diverse elements together and give us a collection completely worthy of his considerable gifts. And if his readers would be patient enough not to wonder what had become of him, if his next volume is not out for a few years, they should have a collection which will place Iain Crichton Smith among the best of our young poets.



## RAYMOND WILLIAMS : THE LONG REVOLUTION

(Chatto &amp; Windus, 30/-)

## JOHN MANDER : THE WRITER &amp; COMMITMENT

(Secker &amp; Warburg, 25/-)

The importance of these two books lies in their different attitudes towards literary material and the relative importance of the social influences. The work of Raymond Williams is mainly an assessment of the roots of cultural change, and in a limited way it tries to do for literature and drama what Jazz has done for music. (A useful supplementary is Francis Newton's "The Jazz Scene" now in Penguin at 4/-). His major contribution is to trace some of the modes of communication public education, reading, language, the press, drama, the novel) and to indicate the forces that limit and encourage the sharing in a common way of life. John Mander is more interested in the way that writers have used their material, how they have differed over the interpretation of social values, and how they have been concerned with the sense of 'commitment'. One writer deals with the broad trends in social, educational and literary history, the other examines the part that certain writers have played within the structure of their society, and the way that social problems have affected their literary technique.

The two writers ought, therefore, to be complementary : that they are not I ought to stress at the beginning. For, as I hope to make clear later, Williams is also studying the question of commitment. By turning over the material factors that influence the way in which a writer obtains his subject-matter and the 'channels of communication' that determine the extent of his participation in a cultural process, he has also, to a lesser degree, shown how Socialist thinking has influenced a writer's artistic consciousness. If we try to understand why people write, what social pressures affect their work, and at the same time have some criterion of socialist values with which to judge them, the study does offer a more useful exercise in the development of our own social consciousness.

In reading John Mander's essays on commitment one is aware of a lack of precision and social sense : indeed he cuts his moorings by dismissing Lucacs and the sociological approach to literature as "not literary criticism proper". It may be true that Socialists frequently ignore the principles of literary criticism in their over-enthusiasm to judge the ideology of a work, but unless one begins with a sociological sense, the selection of writers, for example, becomes almost arbitrary. This is what happens in Mander's book. Why choose Auden and Gunn as the representative 'committed poets' of the 30s and 60s? In the case of Auden it seems that Mander merely wanted to write about him : but was he the most significant committed poet? Why not Aragon, or Lorca, or, if he must be Anglo-American, John Cornforth or Hart Crane? The choice of Gunn is inexplicable if one does not know that Mander was a fellow-student of his at Cambridge. For what is unfortunate in Mander's book is that he has given himself false categories of study : he is trying to see what is different between the Old and the New left (almost, at this stage,

a naïve comparison), yet he is rooted to undisclosed ideas of Socialism and a subtle 'quality' of commitment. There is little evidence that he knows what he requires of Socialist literature; therefore when he comes to relate the analysis of his various writers to a quality of sincerity (which I presume is what he wants) there is no ideology against which one can measure his analysis.

In his essay on Thom Gunn, he is tracing the poet's *ideas* of the pattern of human behaviour, making it an abstract study of the Human Condition and of the kinds of tensions produced by certain types of action. In other words, Mander has a scheme of ideas which he wants to work out in a theory of poetry, and, because he happens to know Gunn, he tries to fit him to his theory. I do not believe that Gunn conforms to this pattern. His work is, it seems to me, a search for identity:

Being without quality  
I appear to you at first  
as an unkempt smudge, a blur,  
an indefinite haze, merely  
pricking the eyes, almost  
nothing. Yet you perceive me . . .

If Gunn has any commitment it is of a crypto-fascist kind ("I praise the overdogs"), and the test of his commitment is not whether he is laying the foundations of "an explicitly political poetry" (who wants a political poetry anyhow?) but how he appears in relation to other human beings. The significance of commitment is that it deals with the writer's social relations. The point is brought out in Mander's distinction between working-class attitudes and Socialist ones.

"A working-class attitude is, typically, one that argues from things as they are to the conclusion that they will always remain so; it is essentially conservative. The Socialist, on the other hand, argues from things as they are to things as they ought to be."

This is surely a false distinction. It takes a conclusion from public opinion polls and treats it as if it were a piece of social analysis. It ignores the social origins of literary material, and the degree to which the writer identifies himself with a class or group; yet it is his indentification rather than his ideology which counts. Commitment is the complex of experiences which are in themselves important to the writer, because they grow out of those human relationships which have for him a special meaning.

'The Long Revolution' provides a much more important contribution to the subject of commitment. Although his chapters on the development of education, reading and the press are useful as part of a complete picture, Williams seems to me far surer of his material when he analyses 'the social history of English writers', 'the social history of dramatic forms' and 'realism and the contemporary novel'. The puzzling quality of much of 'The Long Revolution' is due to Williams' definition of 'culture' as a 'whole way of life' ('Culture and Society' p. xviii). This anthropological use of the word is, as he says, "a complex . . . an account of historical formation." Thus there are two parts to the study: the analysis of habits of mind, intellectual and moral trends, the style or way of life; and the more particular manifestation of these in literary or artistic creation. Throughout 'Culture & Society' and 'The Long Revolution', the complexes behind the manifestations are studied as well as the actual forms; and, however difficult it is to take in the complete range



of cultural patterns, the discipline becomes necessary if we are to understand the value, meaning and structure of our art as well as the more specific part that we play in it as individuals. We can only see the value of a writer if we place him sociologically and know how his writing developed its particular relation to society. The quality of his craftsmanship is a matter for later examination, but first we must know for whom he purports to speak, to what degree he is successful, and what the social pressures are that influence his work.

Williams is surely much more valuable in this context than Mander, and indeed Williams' literary criticism is better than his social criticism because he is surer of his own values and critical tools. His treatment of social history is marred by an inadequate examination of the use of ideologies. He has no chapter, for example, on the influence of Christian thought and institutions, and none on either the Labour Movement or the impact of Imperial policy. With literature and drama, on the other hand, he shows an awareness of the whole complexity of such influences and is able to elaborate his criticism in a specific manner.

Briefly, his main points seem to be these. On the origins of contemporary writers and the response of the reading public he writes that "A large part of modern writing . . . has been communicated through the institutions of the minority public . . . Most of the new writers from the families of clerical and industrial workers are in fact being read not by the social groups from which they come, but by the dissident middle-class . . . As a society changes its literature changes, though often in unexpected ways, for it is part of a social growth and not simply its reflexion. At times a social group will create new institutions which, as it were, release its own writers. At other times, writers from new social groups will simply make their way into existing institutions and work largely within their terms." (p. 243). This appears to me to be one of the most fruitful ways of seeing the rôle of a writer – that is, not only as a 'marginal' figure who is expressing his own view of social conflicts (writing out of "the living moment" as D. H. Lawrence called it) but as part of a social revolution. And although the notion of class-conflict may be too fierce for the analysis of literature, more can be said for it than for the aesthetic critique.

The problems for art-forms that are posed when industrial habits change and when a social group assumes control of the machinery of one branch of art, are seen in the decline of popular drama and the rise of the cinema and TV. Drama as education and debate has come to be the prerogative of a small social circle. As Williams says: "The weaknesses of such [dramatic forms], hitherto, seem to me to have a social basis, in that the values ordinarily appealed to, especially in English verse drama and some romantic drama, have been based, not on contemporary experience . . . but on the preserved values of other societies and other drama, the groups supporting them being essentially opposed to the general directions of our society." (p. 272).

When Williams comes to the rôle of the artist or writer within the society, and tries to state his view of commitment, he can see both the individual problems of creation and the question of public response. Perhaps the clearest statement appears in his chapter on realism where he thinks of the realist tradition in fiction as one which "creates and judges the quality of a whole way of life in terms of the qualities of persons." And he proceeds to elaborate: "The society is not a background against



which the personal relationships are studied, nor are the individuals merely illustrations of aspects of the way of life . . . . We attend with our whole senses to every aspect of the general person, yet the centre of value is always in the individual human person . . . ” (p. 278).

This seems to be what John Berger is saying in ‘Permanent Red’ when he asks of painting or sculpture : “ Does this work help or encourage men to know and claim their social rights?” Even if ‘social rights’ requires some clarification, the meaning is surely clear, and provides that necessary bridge between the organisation of society and the work of the artist. This is why Dylan Thomas, not Thom Gunn, is important if we are trying to ‘place’ writers in terms of commitment, in spite of Mander’s remarks to the contrary. For this commitment is implicit in Thomas’ lines :

Not for the proud man apart  
From the raging moon I write  
On these spendthrift pages  
Nor for the towering dead  
With their nightingales and psalms  
But for the lovers, their arms  
Round the griefs of the ages  
Who pay no praise or wages  
Nor heed my craft or art.

Whether the result is “cosmic and metaphysical” is not the point here : the significance lies in the sympathy and indentification.

IAN HAMILTON

## Apology

At morning now, it is the brush  
Of your damp hair along my blood  
That wakes me. And your look that kills.

Last night, I stared you down so hard  
You cried to get away. You could  
Not breathe. My cold hands made you cry.

And now for shame these bullies would  
Mould you to peace again, they speed  
Such scares across your skin as I

Had never guessed their postures could  
Persuade. You bristle to my touch.  
You moan. You move beyond my skills.

IAN HAMILTON : born Kings Lynn, 1938. Educated at Darlington Grammar School and Keble College, Oxford. Editor of the literary review ‘TOMORROW’.

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# Ode on a Grecian Urn



*When Hebe was displaced by Ganymede  
To Earth she straight repair'd with frantick Speed,  
Whither arriving, she was much surpris'd  
To find that daedal Mortals had devised  
For their Refreshment, an Elysian Brew  
Surpassing far the Nectar that she knew.  
So Skyward the celestial Bar-maid soar'd  
Where Gods and GoddesSES with one Accord,  
Who tasted of this Lickour's Strength and Flavour,  
Received her back into her wonted Favour.  
With Chaunts of Praise and Thanks Olympus rings  
For all the Health and Vigour GUINNESS brings.*